

# LOCATION2018

## CALIFORNIA

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# LOCATION2018

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SHOWCASING CALIFORNIA'S PRODUCTION INDUSTRY

### LOCATION2018 CALIFORNIA

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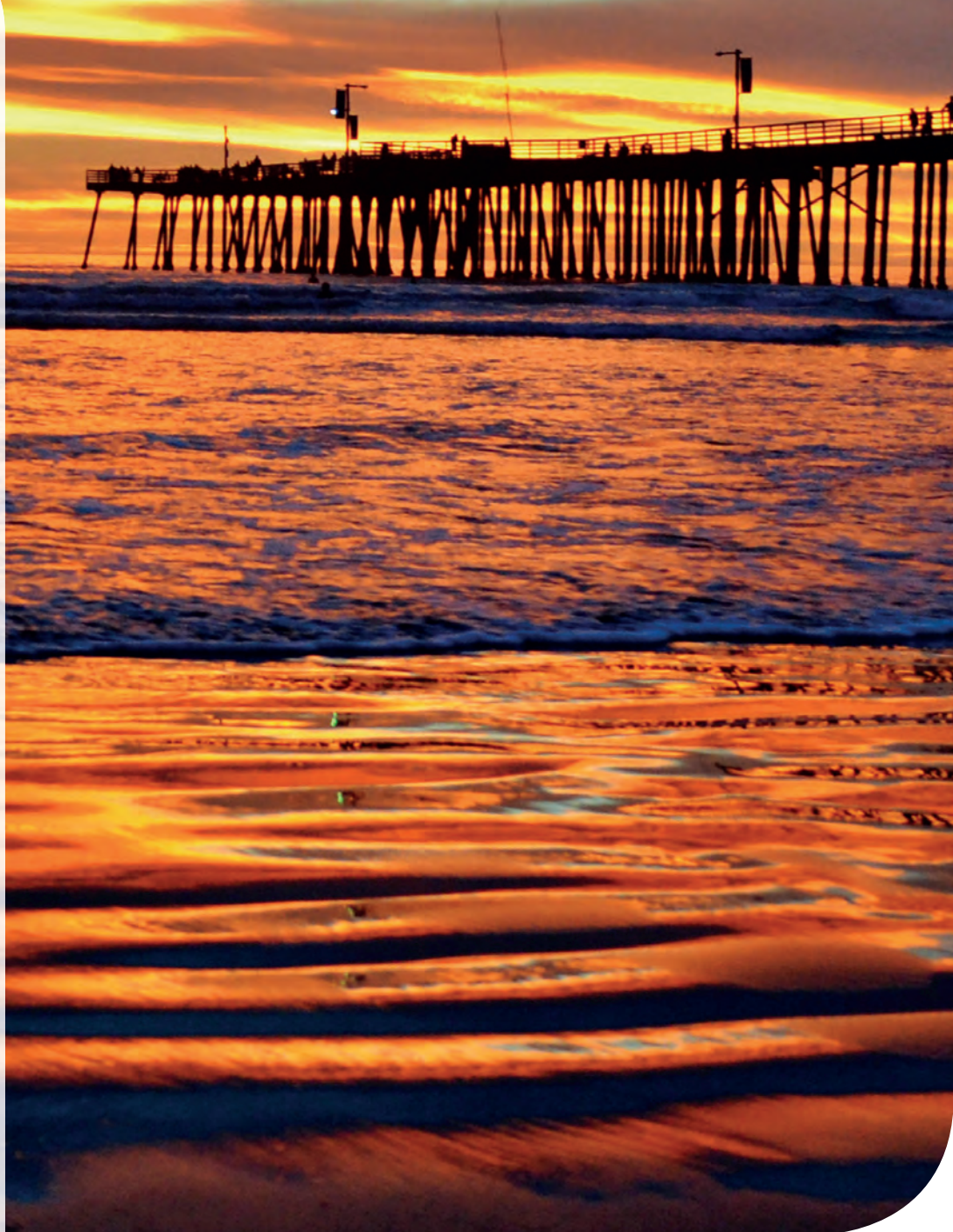
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#### SUNSET AT PISMO BEACH, SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

Our cover shows Pismo Beach, a city on California's Central Coast. It's known for its wineries and extensive beaches — a beautiful location, with the look of a classic California coastal town and featuring this historic pier, popular with fishing enthusiasts. Typically there are no permitting fees in the city unless special requests require government or police assistance. Obtaining a permit is generally quick and straightforward.  
(Photo, courtesy Pismo Beach Conference & Visitors Bureau)





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MAKING  
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# ‘Any of us can be a hero’



Disney's *A Wrinkle in Time* is the first movie with a budget of \$100M-plus to take advantage of California's expanded tax credit program. It is also the first with that budget to be directed by an African-American — Ava DuVernay — the first black woman to receive an Academy Award nomination for Best Film, 2014's *Selma*. But it's not all about industry milestones. It's also about bringing an inspirational story to life for millions of people to whom it means so much. And it's shot with real people in real locations. Julian Newby reports



## MAKING A SCENE A WRINKLE IN TIME

Storm Reid as Meg Murry and  
Levi Miller as Calvin O'Keefe in  
Disney's *A Wrinkle In Time*  
Photo: Atsushi Nishijima







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Chris Pine is Meg's father, world-renowned physicist Mr. Murry. Photo: Atsushi Nishijima



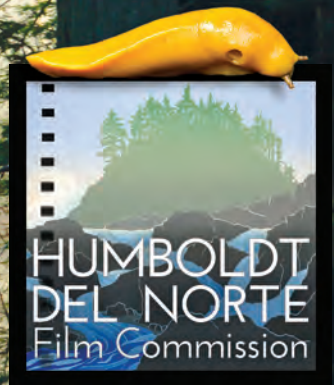
**A**DAPTED from Madeleine L'Engle's classic 1962 science-fantasy time-travel novel, *A Wrinkle in Time* (2018) follows 13-year-old Meg Murry (Storm Reid) and her younger brother Charles Wallace (Deric McCabe) as they travel through space and time in search of their missing scientist father. Joining them on their adventure is Meg's classmate Calvin (Levi Miller) and three very peculiar neighbors — Mrs. Which, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Whatsit — known collectively as The Mrs. and played respectively by Oprah Winfrey, Mindy Kaling and Reese Witherspoon. Like the *Narnia* and *Harry Potter* movies, *A Wrinkle in Time* is a cinema adaptation that a couple of generations — particularly in the US — had been waiting for. In the words of Oprah Winfrey: "I felt like we were making the new *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) for another generation". Where it may go further than *Oz*, *Potter* or *Narnia* — which in their own way established young women characters as heroes — *A Wrinkle in Time* has a young woman of color heading out on a seemingly impossible quest, and succeeding. "It was always Ava's vision to tell the story of a young 'brown girl' as she described Meg, and that the parents would be of mixed race — and then it would be a story of her coming into being

and owning her place in the universe," says the film's producer Jim Whitaker. "So the point-of-view of the casting was very clear from Ava, right from when she originally decided that she was interested in directing the film." "She's imperfect, she's all of us, she's in a package that's different from most cinematic heroes," DuVernay says. "A black girl with curly hair and glasses. It's the idea that any of us can be a hero." At the start of the story, Meg is an awkward but

loving girl, insecure like so many children of her age and worried for her father, who has been missing for over a year. The story begins with the arrival of Mrs. Whatsit at the Murry house on 'a dark and stormy night'. The strange-looking Mrs. Whatsit reveals herself to have certain powers, including the ability to read Meg's thoughts. She tells Meg's mother of the existence of a tesseract — a sort of 'wrinkle' in space and time — and it is through this wrinkle that Meg and her companions will travel to the planet Camazotz, where Mr. Murry is being held captive. "I loved the book as a child and I felt like it could be big in both size and scope as a movie — but most importantly, in telling the story of the emotional journey of a young girl coming into her own," Whitaker says. "I had a real desire to see it on the screen." An in-house producer with Disney, Whitaker had approached the company with the idea of adapting the book to the big screen, only to find that they were already in the process of trying to obtain the rights. "I explained the type of film that I would be interested in making, and basically they offered me the job," he says. DuVernay didn't accept the film immediately when Disney first offered it to her in 2016. She had never read *A Wrinkle in Time* — she and her

**Jim Whitaker**  
*"Ava grew up here in the Los Angeles area and so she really wanted to set the movie in Los Angeles"*





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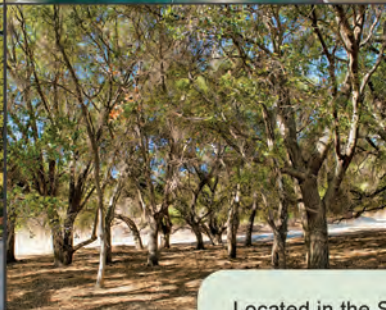
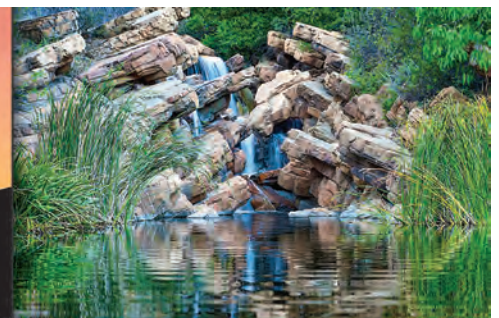
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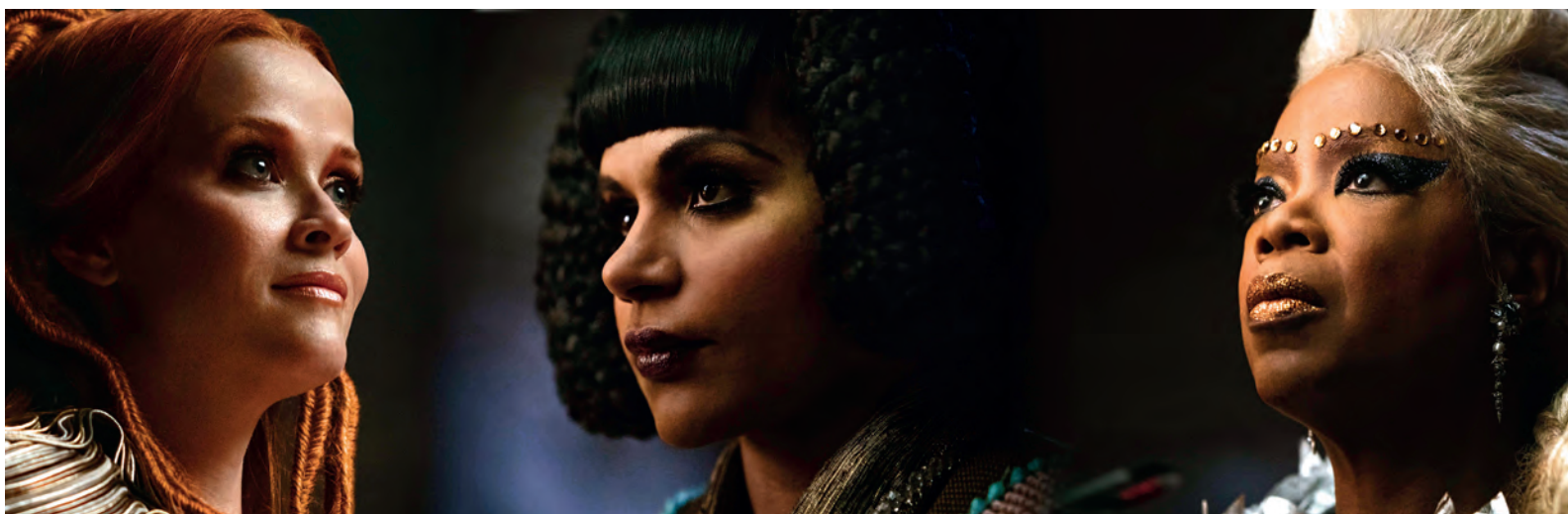
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The three celestial beings: Mrs. Whatsit (Reese Witherspoon), Mrs. Who (Mindy Kaling) and Mrs. Which (Oprah Winfrey)  
Photo: Atsushi Nishijima



Jim Whitaker and Ava DuVernay, on location for *A Wrinkle in Time*

friend and collaborator Oprah Winfrey, who grew up in Compton and Milwaukee, both say it “missed their neighborhoods”.

But when Disney executive Tendo Nagenda encouraged her to “imagine the worlds you can create... planets, and you get to decide what they look like”, DuVernay remembers thinking: “How many women hear that? How many people of color hear that?”

Once she had taken hold of the project, it became crucial to her — and to the movie — how Meg and her environment would be portrayed.

“From Ava’s point of view, she grew up here in the Los Angeles area and so she really wanted to set the movie in Los Angeles,” Whitaker says. “In the early parts of the movie it was important to capture the emotional quality and connect it to Meg — the kind of schools that she went to, the kind of feeling of L.A. and the palm trees and the kind of grounded quality that you can feel in the city. It was really important to be in real-life California before we went on this fantastical journey. Then the movie becomes open to different opportunities, but we were also able to find a lot of those locations here as well. We really shot almost all the movie here in California.”

The story kicks off in L.A. and then moves to the rest of the universe — where Meg slowly finds her strength of character and, eventually, her father. But the production didn’t have to leave California even to find the out-of-this-world locations that were needed.

“We were able to find everything we really wanted almost entirely here. And for me it was

even a personal revelation — I mean we went to Humboldt County, which I’d never been to,” Whitaker says. “And the first thing I did was pick up the phone and call my wife and say, ‘My God it’s beautiful up here, we should come up here more — because it’s so gorgeous!’. We went to a lot of other places around the state that were equally interesting — some of them I was more familiar with than others, but it was incredible what we were able to find. You know California offers a lot and it was nice to be able to travel around it, show it in the film and use it and be able to travel to those places within the context of the story we were telling.”

The film actually brought new business to Patrick’s State Park in Humboldt County. Although chosen as a location by the production, the Park has little experience of hosting film shoots. “We helped the State Park with the production’s requests,” says Film Commissioner for Humboldt & Del Norte Counties, Cassandra Hesseltine. “In the end, the movie helped pave the way for future filming in the Park now that they have had a major picture there.”

“One of the most wonderful aspects of this film is that the story takes place on several planets, each of which has a very different look and feel,” supervising location manager on *A Wrinkle in Time*, Alison Taylor, says. “The majority of the L.A. locations are representing earth so we are able to

show Los Angeles for Los Angeles, which is great because we are able to show the beauty of the city.” She adds: “For other planets we used locations at the beach, on a ranch, in a quarry and even in a military housing neighborhood.”

For Whitaker, filming on location was crucial to give a real-world feel to what is a fantastical story. “From very early on, with the conversations I had with Ava, we wanted the film to be very grounded. It was important when portraying the emotional journey of a character who was traveling through space and time, that she would be in a world with which audiences would be familiar. So we tried to make sure that the entire film was shot on location as much as we possibly could. And that was a very important first decision of the movie.”

Whitaker was on location for much of the filming and says the crew “got pretty lucky” on several occasions. “There was a scene that we were filming that is featured in the trailer — it involves the two young heroines going through a storm. And a storm rolled through just as we were shooting. So we said, ‘Okay, roll it! We can add a little bit of rain if we need it, but basically this is working for us!’ We had a lot of fortunate happy accidents like that.” So there’s the luxury of shooting in California — which includes going home to your own bed at night — along with the revelation that California cannot just offer worldly locations but even other-worldly backdrops too.

And there are also financial incentives to film in the state. “Yes that does have a play — the first question we ask is, ‘Is the location right creatively?’ But it’s co-mingled with the question of what we can afford and in this case the benefits of what California offered were great — and great enough to outweigh going somewhere else. It’s an important part of the decision-making process and I am very involved in that. It came down to looking at a movie that could have taken place partly in Atlanta, Georgia, where they also have strong incentives, or to be here in California. So, the movie is set in California, the movie lives and breathes California, so to be able to do it here was tremendous and a great thing for us.” ●

**Oprah Winfrey**  
“I felt like we were making the new *The Wizard of Oz* for another generation”







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# WHERE ARE WE?

You may well be in California, but you may not know it. Many movies are shot here but not set here. Andy Fry looks at the state's diversity of locations and some of the productions that have benefited from them

---

Amy Adams in HBO's *Sharp Objects*



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**FILM** commissions all around the world will tell you that they have great locations for doubling. But the truth is that recreating another part of the world in your backyard is about much more than offering a few familiar looking places.

"California is home to an amazing array of architectural and geographic opportunities to double," says location manager Dan Cooley. "But what really sets it apart is the infrastructure that supports it. If you want to recreate New York, for example, you don't have to shoot every scene out on the street, because you can also cheat New York in studios and back lots. And for other looks, you can go to the movie ranches based near to L.A."

One of Cooley's favorite examples of California's versatility is the 2016 movie *The Sweet Life*, which centers on a romantic road trip from Chicago to California. "Apart from one shot, we cheated all of the Chicago elements around L.A. Even better, the movie sees the key characters travel through seven states — and we shot all of them within striking distance of L.A."

Cooley says California's ability to double for other locations is further enhanced by the quality of the state's set dressers and vendors: "You have a film heritage that goes back generations here. It doesn't matter what you need, there will be a company that has been doing it for decades. For the Amazon series *Good Girls Revolt* (2015-), we shot a 1970s New York winter in present day L.A. — during the summer. That's California."

Orange County film commissioner Janice Arrington is another who talks up California's ability to double. "In 2017, we welcomed George Clooney and the Coen Brothers, who were shooting the indie movie *Suburbicon*. The production, which starred Matt Damon, used a post-war housing estate in Fullerton to double for 1950s Levittown in Pennsylvania."

Arrington adds that *Suburbicon* included a huge race-riot scene, involving 250 extras, based on a true-life events. "Also, the local authorities had recently pulled down some palm trees with a view to replanting them. We managed to persuade them to delay replanting by a few months so that the production could shoot it as Pennsylvania," she adds.

Because of its well-established craft base, the ability to 'double' modern-

day L.A. for previous eras is a particular California talent, Arrington adds — whether that's other US locations or L.A. itself.

At the 2017 California On Location Awards, for example, two of the three finalists in the one-hour television category were shows that had expertly recreated bygone eras. In Showtime's *I'm Dying Up Here* (2017-) the emphasis was on L.A.'s famous stand-up scene in the 1970s. FX's *Snowfall* (2017-), meanwhile, took viewers back to the crack-cocaine epidemic of the 1980s.

It's not just old L.A. and cities like New York and Chicago that California can replicate. Location manager Mandi Dillin managed to recreate Texas in L.A. for Jill Soloway's adaptation of the Chris Kraus novel *I Love Dick*. And Orange County's Arrington adds that the city of Costa Mesa has also done a great job of doubling for Las Vegas, using various locations including a local Hilton.

The southern part of California also has vast experience in cheating Florida hotspot Miami, with Orange County and Long Beach often sharing duties on high-profile TV franchises. Tasha Day, special events and filming co-ordinator for the city of Long Beach, 12 miles from downtown L.A., says: "If you want Miami, come to Long Beach. *CSI Miami* (2002-12), *Dexter* (2006-13), *Rosewood* (2015-17), and now *Ballers* (2015-)

have all shot here." The main reason for this, Day says, is the geographic and architectural similarities between the Long Beach and Miami waterfront districts. But the real clincher is the professional support available to producers: "The city's filming office is set up so it all goes through my office, which means you don't have to communicate directly with the fire and police departments or businesses. We have police and fire personnel who are dedicated to special events and know all about shutting down roads, making explosions and dropping cars into water."

*Ballers* location manager Eric Fierstein endorses Day's assessment: "One of our biggest accomplishments during season three of *Ballers* was closing a bridge to do a traffic-jam scene. The Long Beach film commission

#### TASHA DAY

"We have police and fire personnel who are dedicated to special events and know all about shutting down roads, making explosions and dropping cars into water"

was really supportive in helping us put together a scene that hadn't been attempted before."

While Long Beach offers numerous Miami cheats, Fierstein stresses that sustaining the illusion on *Ballers* requires a lot of production expertise, particularly because the first two seasons of the show were filmed in Miami: "When you start to look really closely, you see there are differences in the weather, waterways, color shades, and architecture. But the fact we were able to cheat Miami without anyone being able to spot the difference is another testament to the skills of the production crews and locations teams in California."

HBO's football comedy drama *Ballers* is complicated because it all ▲



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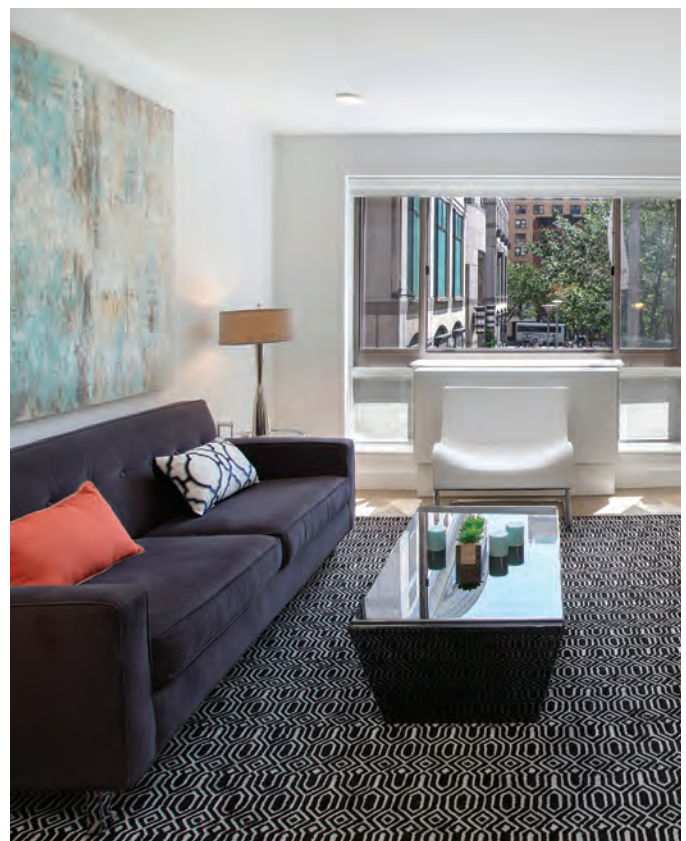


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***Ballers* all takes place out on location, with no studio filming**

takes place out on location, with no studio filming. “So we are looking for a lot of locations,” Fierstein says. “We scoured cities and counties all over L.A. — Long Beach, San Pedro, Orange County, Ventura County, Santa Clarita and so on. We found one perfect Miami house in the middle of an area that was completely, typically L.A.”

One of the most ambitious shoots in season three of *Ballers* involved a hook-up with truck event Monster Jam World Finals. Fierstein explains: “We did some filming at the home of Monster Jam in Las Vegas, but then we also did a major scene with Monster Jam trucks and drivers in Santa Clarita. That was a real logistical effort.”

California offered up a tax credit of \$8.3M which was key to *Ballers* season three moving from Miami to California. The reason, says Amy Lemisch, executive director of the California Film Commission, is that the season’s 10 episodes employed 135 cast members, 209 base-crew members and 5,700 extras. It generated around \$33.5M in qualified expenditures — wages paid to below-the-line workers and payments to in-state vendors. No real surprise, then, that the California Film Commission has just approved a new incentive for season four.

Back in Long Beach, Day says the city can also double for Boston or Atlanta, though “we excel more at ‘anywhere America’”. This probably explains why Long Beach and its surrounding areas are so popular with horror-film producers, since part of the appeal of such films is that the gruesome events depicted could happen anywhere. *Child’s Play 2* (1990), *The Haunting* (1999), *Red Dragon* (2002) and the 2014 version of *Amityville* are all examples. “For *Amityville*, the producers built a house at El Dorado Park, which has long been a popular location for movie producers,” Day adds.

Monica Harrison, who launched her location-services company L.A. Film Locations in 2003, says: “California can double for almost any world landscape.” In addition to New York, Miami and Boston, it all has a good supply of Washington D.C.-style landscaping: “We help CBS with both *NCIS* (2003-), which is set in Washington, and *NCIS: Los Angeles* (2009-), which is set locally. One wants palms trees and the other doesn’t! There

are plenty of houses with East Coast-type landscaping, but we can also avoid palm trees by covering them up if necessary.”

Among more remote geographies, California has been used to double for Iraq, Afghanistan, France, Mexico, Asia, and Russia. “We have a street with town houses that has been shot as Georgetown and also Paris, France,” Harrison says. “I also know of a house in Southern California that can easily be doubled as a house in Madrid, Spain, because the topography is so similar.”

One underestimated advantage of doubling in California, Harrison says, is the weather, which makes filming time very productive. She adds: “There may be a great incentive to go to another location, but if you’re dealing with a series that needs to film most of the year, weather is a challenge. Losing valuable production time costs money.”

Like Cooley, Harrison also stresses that doubling requires a lot of know-how: “We just shot a commercial that transformed a business-park grass area into a small-town farmer’s market. It took the foresight of the

**ERIC FIERSTEIN**

“The fact we cheated Miami on *Ballers* without anyone spotting the difference is a testament to the skills of the production crews and locations teams in California”



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***Good Girls Revolt*, takes place in a 1970s New York winter and shot in present-day L.A. — during the summer**

location manager to imagine it could be done at this location and then it took the talent of the art department to make it look real. It was a beautiful set, complete with a petting zoo, food and flower booths, and more.” Harrison is especially effusive about California’s location professionals: “They don’t always get credit for what they do. They must understand what the director is envisioning for the scenes, because each director has a different style. They must also envision what the art department can transform a location into to keep it realistic. And at the same time, they must make sure the logistics of filming in these locations make sense. They are the artists and the logistical masterminds of every location.”

Her views are endorsed by *Westworld* (2016-) showrunner Jonathan Nolan, who told Location Managers Guild International magazine that it was “impossible to imagine” making the HBO series without location manager Mandi Dillin: “The complexity of what she pulled off is mindboggling, and she did it without incident. We had days when four or five directors were shooting. Imagine trying to shoot three summer blockbusters simultaneously in a half-dozen locations. She’s an MVP for sure.”

Location manager Gregory Alpert, whose recent projects include HBO’s *Big Little Lies* (2017-) and *Sharp Objects* (2018-), is another who celebrates the amazing array of geographies found in close proximity to L.A.: “You can double almost anywhere in the world within a 60-mile radius of Los Angeles. The variety and volume of terrain is unmatched by anywhere I’ve seen.”

*Sharp Objects*, based on the bestselling novel by Gillian Flynn, is a classic example of California’s versatility. Alpert says: “The story is set in Missouri but, apart from one Georgia location, it’s all shot in California to take advantage of state incentives.”

Mostly, *Sharp Objects* was filmed around L.A., although one key location was unearthed in Mendocino County in Northern California. “The director, Jean-Marc Vallée, who I also worked with on *Big Little Lies*, had a very particular vision of a location he wanted — a Victorian house in

the middle of nowhere. So I drove around getting lost on purpose and talking to everyone. But every Victorian house I went to look at was at the center of a historic town that had grown up around it.”

Eventually, Alpert asked the California Film Commission to blast out an email to film commissioners across the state. “And Mendocino came back with a low-resolution image of this yellow Victorian house all by itself in Redwood Valley. I went to see it and my first reaction was amazement. Fortunately, Jean-Marc also wanted it. For me, it really underlined California’s ability to deliver.”

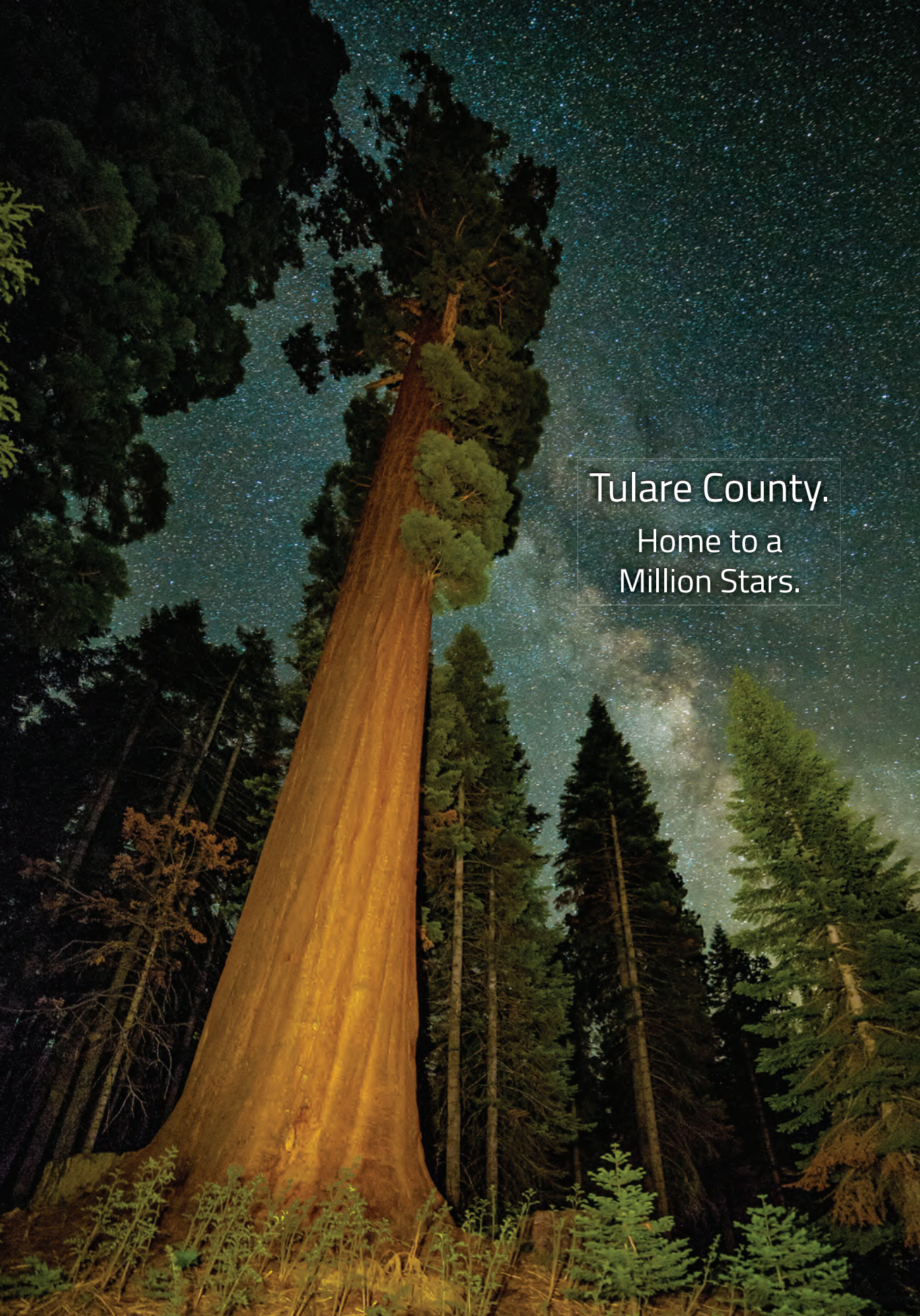
As referenced by Cooley, a big part of California’s doubling capability is down to its studio backlots and movie ranches. Paramount has one of the best-known backlots in L.A., offering eight New York looks within a compact five-acre site. These include Brooklyn, brownstones, Greenwich Village and the city’s financial district. In addition, there is a Chicago section, which offers the common architectural styles found in the Midwest.

The backlots are especially convenient for producers that want to double L.A. for other parts of the US without having to worry about permit fees, cordoning off traffic or moving crew across the country. Other L.A./New York doubling options are the Universal backlot, the Warner Bros. backlot and the CBS Studio Center backlot.

The movie ranches, meanwhile, are booming enterprises that have grown up over many years around the fringes of L.A. Two of the best known are in Ventura County’s Simi Valley: the Big Sky Movie Ranch, whose recent credits include *Django Unchained* (2012), *Saving Mr. Banks* (2013), Stephen King’s *Mercy* (2014), and HBO series *The Newsroom* (2012-14); and the Hummingbird Nest Ranch, which featured in Oliver Stone’s 2012 movie *Savages*, doubling for Mexico.

Hummingbird Nest offers a range of buildings and locations, including a Spanish colonial villa and a 1920s brick ranch house. According to the ranch’s director of filming, Angela Fogg, it is often the first port of call for location managers “looking for a home for a Latin American drug lord!”. She adds: “But our houses have also been dressed as hotels, ▲





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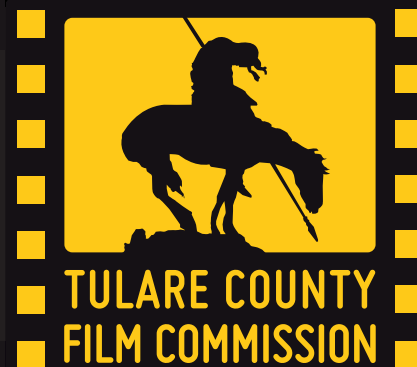


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*Suburbicon* used a post-War housing estate in Fullerton to double for 1950s Levittown in Pennsylvania

rehab centers, spas, restaurants, and so on.”

Fogg says Hummingbird Nest has put a lot of effort into networking with location managers over the last seven years. This marketing effort, combined with the arrival of the Film & TV Tax Credit Program 2.0 and the growth of the SVOD players, is now paying off. “In this business, you have to build up trust because so many people have been burnt before,” Fogg adds. “We’re now at the point where we had 40-45 productions in 2017, which was a great year for us, with similar levels of activity in early 2018.”

Indie films including *Book Club* (2018), starring Diane Keaton and Andy Garcia, have been a key part of Hummingbird Nest’s surge in activity. “Among TV series, we’ve had *NCIS: Los Angeles*, *The Affair* (2014-), *The Last Man on Earth* (2015-), *Shooter* (2016-), *Timeless* (2016-), and *The Arrangement* (2017-),” Fogg says. She adds that the ranch is very accommodating in terms of the work it allows productions to do: “We’ve had gunfire, explosives, crazy stunts — and there must be a body being buried here every week. For one production, we had a car being dropped in our swimming pool from above. In another, we had a car going over the edge of a bridge into a ravine.”

Like many in the L.A. area, Fogg has expansion on her mind: “We have a number of barns and auxiliary buildings that have been adapted for

productions. But what we’d really like is a small sound stage so that producers could anchor themselves here. The first thing we need is a new access road into the ranch, so that’s one of the short-term investments we’re planning.”

Other exotic locations can be found in Santa Clarita, where there are more than 10 filming ranches, including Disney’s Golden Oak Ranch, Rancho Deluxe, Rancho Maria, Sable Ranch and the Veluzat Motion Picture Ranch. In hot demand, for example, is Blue Cloud Movie Ranch’s Middle Eastern town, which has been built up and expanded since owner Dylan Lewis took over three years ago. “Historically, Southern California’s dry, dusty terrain was used for Western-themed shows, and that’s still the case with series like *Westworld* (2016-),” Lewis says. “But in recent times, there have been a lot of films and series that need Middle Eastern locations, so we have buttressed up the town and added a forward operating base that military veterans say is very similar to what they know from their time serving in Iraq or Afghanistan.”

Blue Cloud’s Middle Eastern town featured in the Clint Eastwood movie *American Sniper* (2014) and is now home to CBS’ new scripted series *SEAL Team* (2017), which is using it to double for present-day Afghanistan. In addition, *SEAL Team* has also used the Pomona area, an hour away from Santa Clarita, to do duty for South Sudan, San Pedro to stand in for the Philippines, and Soledad Canyon near Acton to double for Paraguay.

In an interview with the Los Angeles Times, Christopher Chulack, an executive producer on the hit CBS show, said: “We want to shoot it as realistically as we can. Here in California, you have oceans and the desert, and it’s the variances of landscape that is conducive to transporting the audience to foreign lands.”

Blue Cloud’s Lewis is another who praises the great production support on offer in California: “There are amazing craftspeople here who can blow up a section of the town and have it rebuilt in no time. And the strength of the ranch environment is that we can have helicopters flying down canyons and explosions going off without anyone hearing.” ▲

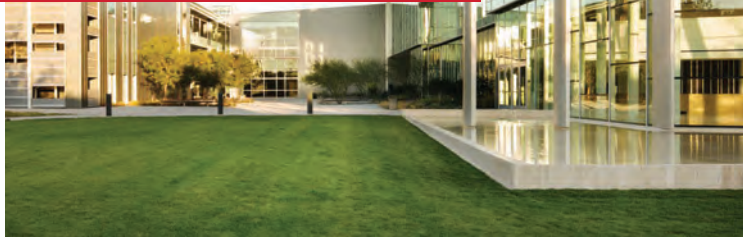
ANGELA FOGG

“We’ve had gunfire, explosives, crazy stunts — and there must be a body being buried here every week”





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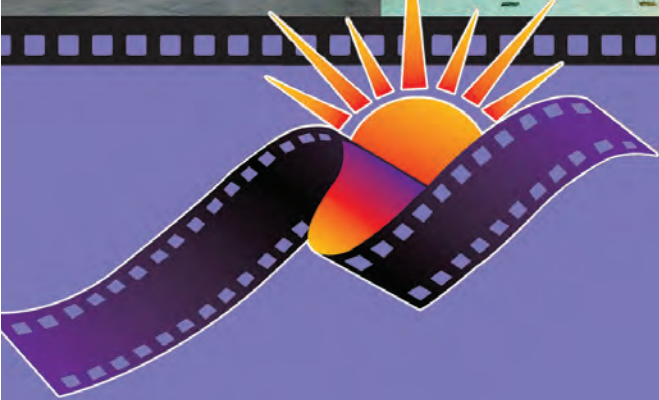
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Blue Cloud's Middle Eastern town stands in for Afghanistan in CBS' scripted series *SEAL Team*

Lewis' reference to explosions is significant, because California is still the world leader in the manufacture and safe usage of pyrotechnics for film and TV productions. In addition, says California Film Commission's Lemisch, military series filming in California also benefits from the state's large number of military bases, both functioning and mothballed, that will service film and TV shoots. Edwards Air Force Base, for example, has appeared in the *Transformers* and *Iron Man* franchises, while decommissioned battleship USS Iowa has hosted *The Last Ship* (2014-) and *NCIS: Los Angeles*.

Back at Blue Cloud, Lewis is also noticing a growing trend towards series with a Latino profile, so he is now expanding in this direction: "We've already added a mission-style church and we are now planning a Latin-style town that can double as a European town."

Echoing Day's observations about California's ability to double for 'any town America', Lewis says one of the big strengths of ranches like Blue Cloud is that they include large tracts of non-descript terrain: "From the point of view of doubling, you don't want your backdrops to be too distinctive, because it makes it easier for audiences to see if it's been used before. Ideally, you want topography that can double for different parts of the world without drawing too much attention to itself"

While there is an understandable tendency for productions to stay close to L.A., there are excellent doubling options across the state. Santa Barbara, some 60 miles north of L.A., has had a steady turnover of projects recently, including feature film *Mirror of My Soul* and Nickelodeon TV series *Ride* (2016-). With a 5% uplift on the basic state tax credit, and as well as its own small local incentive for new productions, the area offers vineyards, ranches, farmlands, winding roads, sand dunes, deserted beaches, forests, mountains, and eye-catching Spanish architecture. Looks it is able to cheat include the old South, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and parts of Europe. Kern County, an hour to the north of L.A., sees around \$20M worth of production each year and is well known as the home of Tejon Ranch, a huge enterprise that counts filming among its many commercial activities. With around 420 square miles of

rolling hills, mountain vistas, lone trees, private paved roads and wide-open spaces with no visible power lines, it has hosted everything from films and scripted series to commercials, music videos and still shoots. One major project this year was a Super Bowl ad for Kia, which starred Melissa McCarthy as a well-intentioned but inept eco-warrior. In one segment of the campaign, Tejon landscapes double for Africa, as McCarthy is pursued in her Kia by a crazy CGI rhinoceros.

Beautiful Lake Tahoe in Placer County is often cast as itself, as in the opening episode of season nine of *Modern Family* (2009-). But its spectacular setting has also seen it double for Alaska, Colorado and even Antarctica in 1990's *Total Recall*. Placer locations include snowy vistas, mountains, lakes, white-water rivers/rapids, forests, Gold Rush towns, farmlands, and all kinds of roads. Echoing a common theme in California, Placer offers many unexpected types of locations, ranging from high-tech industries and architecture to historic estates.

Elsewhere, Monterey County film commissioner Karen Nordstrand says her area has a long history of doubling. "Some of our ranches offer visions of Kansas or New Mexico," she says. "Our vast vineyards and gentle hills are reminiscent of Tuscany." Monterey has also stood in for coastal Scotland (*Lassie Come Home*/1943), Louisiana swamp-land (*The Muppet Movie*/1979) and Vietnam's Central Highlands ▲

#### DYLAN LEWIS

"There are amazing craftspeople here who can blow up a section of the town and have it rebuilt in no time"





FX's *Snowfall* took viewers back to the crack-cocaine epidemic of the 1980s

(*We Were Soldiers*/2002). “We even provided the look for the beginning of time on earth for two *Cosmos* TV shows,” Nordstrand adds.

San Francisco and the Bay Area is also growing in popularity as a location, in part because it can double. Location manager Jonathan Shedd, for example, recalls how Mission and 6th played the Lower East side of New York in *Rent* (2005). “And we dressed South Park as if it were Tompkins Square Park in NYC,” he adds.

Susannah Robbins, executive director of the San Francisco Film Commission, points to the city’s wide range of architecture, from traditional Victorians to ultra-modern structures, grand city buildings that could be European, a Chinatown, and park-like neighborhoods with a suburban vibe. “We also have a downtown area with stone buildings and narrow streets that can stand in for New York,” she says.

According to Robbins, many producers use San Francisco’s Tenderloin and financial district to double for New York and Chicago: “In addition, our Chinatown can play China, the Mission Bay area can double for Shanghai, and the Avenues can offer a generic world ‘city’ that could be anywhere.” San Francisco also stood in for Europe in TV movie *Hemingway & Gellhorn* (2012). In addition, Robbins says, a lot of filming takes place in San Francisco’s industrial spaces, many of which are location-

agnostic and can therefore play as London, Berlin or other Western European cities.

While the ability to double for other places is a big part of California’s appeal, the state also scores well with producers in terms of location diversity. “You have mountains, oceans, deserts, and forests, all in close proximity to each other,” Alpert says. “And they are accessible all year.” California’s coastline is one of its most spectacular assets. “There’s a different vibe as you travel up the coast,” Alpert continues. “The kind of community you find in Monterey is very different to what you would expect to encounter in Southern California.”

Key locations include Big Sur, which starts in San Luis Obispo County but mostly falls under the jurisdiction of film-friendly Monterey County. Nordstrand says major productions to have visited Monterey include *Big Little Lies*, which came to the county to film for four weeks in 2016. Monterey County Film Commission helped the production company to access locations in Fisherman’s Wharf, Del Monte Beach, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, Garrapata State Park Beach, Pacific Grove’s Lovers Point, the world-famous Bixby Bridge, and the scenic, cliff-hanging Highway 1, which runs some 80 miles along the Pacific Ocean and the western edge of Monterey County.

“The production spend was in excess of \$2.25M, and the spin-off in tourism value continues as visitors come to see the settings in the show,” Nordstrand adds.

But Monterey has a lot more to offer than coast, Nordstrand says: “Inland from the coastline are acres of ‘Steinbeck Country’ looks: rural farmland and ranches, vast fields of produce, and vineyards with wine-tasting rooms.”

Just as impressive in their own way are California’s desert landscapes, which are used both to double for other locations and for their own unique beauty. The deserts of San Bernardino County, for example, have been used as Afghanistan (*Iron Man*/2008) and Morocco (*Hidalgo*/2004). San Bernardino locations also featured in *Star Trek*, underlining the otherworldly sci-fi quality of the state’s wildernesses. ▲

**KAREN NORDSTRAND**

“Monterey even provided the look for the beginning of time on earth for two *Cosmos* TV shows”



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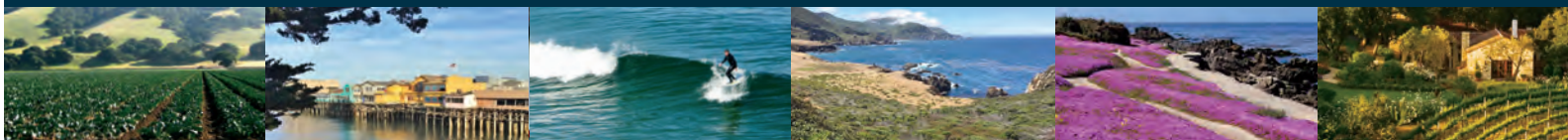
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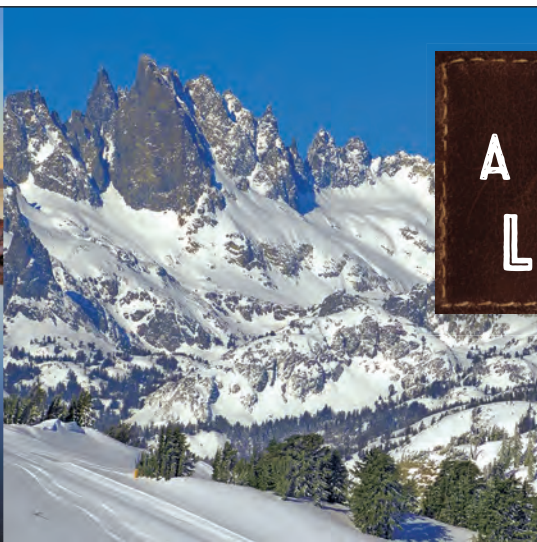
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San Francisco stood in for Europe in TV movie *Hemingway & Gellhorn*

Antelope Valley and the Mojave Desert, meanwhile, have featured in movies such as *Planet of the Apes*, *Land of the Lost* (2009) and *Hulk* (2003). There are many hidden gems, says the California Film Commission's Lemisch. An example is the Anza-Borrego desert, which spans 600,000 acres, hundreds of miles of dirt road and a dozen wilderness areas. Despite having been used in Warren Beatty's *Bugsy* (1991) and Universal's *The Scorpion King* (2002), the area has only issued 31 film permits in the last two years, mainly for commercials, still photo shoots, reality shows and indie films.

However, one project that fell in love with Anza-Borrego was indie movie *Last Days in the Desert* (2015), which qualified for a \$700,000 tax credit from the California Film Commission. According to Lemisch, the producers were so enamored with the location, which is only three-and-a-half hours from L.A., that they shot all 24 days there.

Other desert options include the Vasquez Rocks in the Sierra Pelona Mountains and the Alabama Hills, which are to the east of the Sierra Nevada. Both have very distinctive rock formations that can play other planets in sci-fi films. The same is true of the Mojave Desert's Trona Pinnacles, which fall within the jurisdiction of the Ridgecrest Regional Film

Commission. Trona was used as a location in 1989's *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*, the 2001 version of *Planet of the Apes* and 2011's *Priest*. These days it thrives more on commercials, music videos, and independent films.

San Luis Obispo County, half way between L.A. and San Francisco, has a wealth of coastal locations, including Oceano Dunes, the only drivable beach in California. It also offers iconic piers, classic beach towns and any number of scenic vineyards. Its credits include Korean singer PSY's music video and the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series.

At the other end of the location spectrum from Southern California's deserts is the lush greenery found in the north of the state. Cassandra Hesseltine, film commissioner for Humboldt-Del Norte County, says her area's majestic Redwood trees are a particular attraction and featured prominently in Disney's *A Wrinkle in Time* (2018).

As with California's desert locations, the otherworldly quality of Humboldt-Del Norte's greenery has been useful for sci-fi style doubling — an example being the Will Smith movie *After Earth* (2013). "We get compared to Washington and Canada a lot, so we can be used to double for them," Hesseltine says. "We also had a commercial that shot us for Scotland, while parts of our coastline look like the East Coast. Humboldt's principal city, Eureka, has some beautiful Victorian-style properties that have doubled for 19th-century San Francisco, and many of our towns have plazas and stores for quaint 'any town' shopping scenes."

In addition to its lush, green forests, Hesseltine says Humboldt-Del Norte County also has six pristine rivers. "Netflix was here recently filming around the gorgeous Smith River, which runs through Del Norte. They found some terrific unspoiled locations that have never really been filmed before. One of the additional advantages of shooting around here is that locations are not overly populated, so you can accomplish a lot without having to worry about huge crowds showing up at a shoot. That may seem surprising to anyone more used to Los Angeles." ●

## DAN COOLEY

"For the Amazon series *Good Girls Revolt*, we shot a 1970s New York winter in present day L.A. — during the summer. That's California"





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# A Star Is Born: take four

MAKING  
A SCENE



Two names at the top of the A-list appear together in the fourth incarnation of *A Star Is Born*.

And its leading actor, director, writer and producer, Bradley Cooper, had some very clear ideas about where to shoot the movie. Debbie Lincoln reports

**T**HE WARNER Bros. 2018 release *A Star Is Born* tells the story of Jackson Maine (Bradley Cooper), a country music star whose career has taken a downturn, and talented unknown Ally (Stefani Germanotta/Lady Gaga). As they begin a passionate love affair, Jack encourages Ally in her career and soon a star is born. But Jack's stardom is fading fast and he finds life hard to take as Ally continues to reach new heights.

It's the fourth time this compelling story has been told on the big screen. The original 1937 film starred Janet Gaynor and Fredric March; a 1954 remake had Judy Garland and James Mason in the lead roles; and Barbra Streisand and Kris Kristofferson headlined in the 1976 version. So is this version one too many? Probably not. Male lead Bradley Cooper can do no wrong in the movies right now and audiences will be eager to experience his directorial debut — and experience his talents as singer and musician. Fans of superstar Lady Gaga will be eager to hear the



Bradley Cooper and Lady Gaga in *A Star Is Born*

new music she has written and performed for the film and to see her in a lead role in the movies.

"I always wanted to be an actress on the big screen," Gaga says of her first lead role in a major motion picture. "The story of *A Star Is Born* is so special and I'm so grateful to Bradley for making my dream come true."

Cooper and the production went to great lengths to get an authentic look, not only by using real

locations but also by incorporating real live musical performances. Some of the scenes were filmed at the Coachella and Stagecoach festivals in April 2017. The 1976 version of *A Star Is Born* shot in Arizona, where much of the film is set. So why the move to California? Once again, money played a key role.

"The main reason for shooting in California had to do with the state's tax incentive program,"





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On the road: Jackson and Ally stop for gas in the California desert

says supervising location manager Rick Schuler. “Along with the producers, we met at Bradley Cooper’s residence to discuss the type and style of locations he envisioned for the movie. He had some definite interest in featuring well-known iconic Los Angeles locations, but was also wonderfully open to hear what we pictured in our minds about what the locations would add to the palette of the movie. With five houses, six concert venues, six bars, four hotels, two recording studios, and a Grammy venue among the 60 different locations we needed to find, there was lots of creative input that we could bring to ensure that every one of these locations told the story it needed to tell without seeming to be a repeat of just another venue or house or bar.” Schuler and the film’s location manager Steve Mapel began scouting prior to the Christmas Holiday hiatus. But it wasn’t until January that production offices were established at Warner

**Lady Gaga:**  
*“The story of A Star Is Born is so special and I’m so grateful to Bradley for making my dream come true”*

Bros. and more crew members were hired. “Our scouting concentrated primarily on searching for houses and mansions as well as calling a large number of small and large venues — and to check on their availability. There were going to be tiny windows of availability with the larger venues — such as The Forum, the Greek Theatre, the Staples Center, and The Shrine — so the first thing we did was to affix a large calendar on the wall of our office to track every venue’s availability.”

The calendar never came down as actor availability and other factors kept changing throughout the course of the movie, Schuler says. “The venues were moving targets with extremely limited availability. One interesting scouting assignment was to track down where Judy Garland had lived during the making of her version of the movie shot back in 1953. We located a house in Atwater Village, one in Hancock Park, and one in Lancaster. The latter was quite a surprise discovery. But as happens with our business, the scene involving the Garland house was ultimately cut during the making of the movie.”

The film shot primarily in metropolitan Los Angeles, but also in the Coachella Valley — mainly in Palm Springs and the city of Indio. The Palm Springs area substituted for Arizona and Memphis, Tennessee, while Indio — where the Coachella venue is located — was used to represent various concert venues around the country.

“It was the announcement of Beyoncé’s withdrawal from the Coachella festival in Indio that led us to film during and in between the Coachella and Stagecoach festivals,” Schuler says.

“Golden Voice, the concert producer, had to scramble to find someone else to headline the massive event. They turned to Lady Gaga. Sensing an opportunity, the film’s producers jumped at the opportunity to negotiate a deal wherein they would get our actress in return for the use of the facility between the two weekends, with minimal cost to the production company.” The happy coincidence worked well for another reason — Lady Gaga had expressed a prefer-



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ence that her performance scenes in the movie were filmed live, in front of real audiences. The logistics of co-ordinating the production's presence at Coachella was a huge undertaking, Schuler says. "Coachella is now the largest popular music festival in the country and in 2017 they were sporting an additional 642 acres, pushing the total crowd capacity up to nearly 125,000. But our location team and Golden Voice were up to the task. They were so co-operative and helpful — we were given access to various stages during performances and could pretty much go wherever we needed to, even with the extremely tight security there."

The crew didn't film Lady Gaga actually performing during the weekend event, as she was not in costume or singing the music she specifically wrote for the movie. "It was during the week that we gained total access to the grounds and shot our scenes," Schuler says. "The real concerts allowed us to get live footage of crowds, have Bradley Cooper get on stage in front of real crowds and sing, and use the entire set-up. Our budget could never have afforded even one of the amazing stages that we employed for the filming. Thank you Beyoncé!"

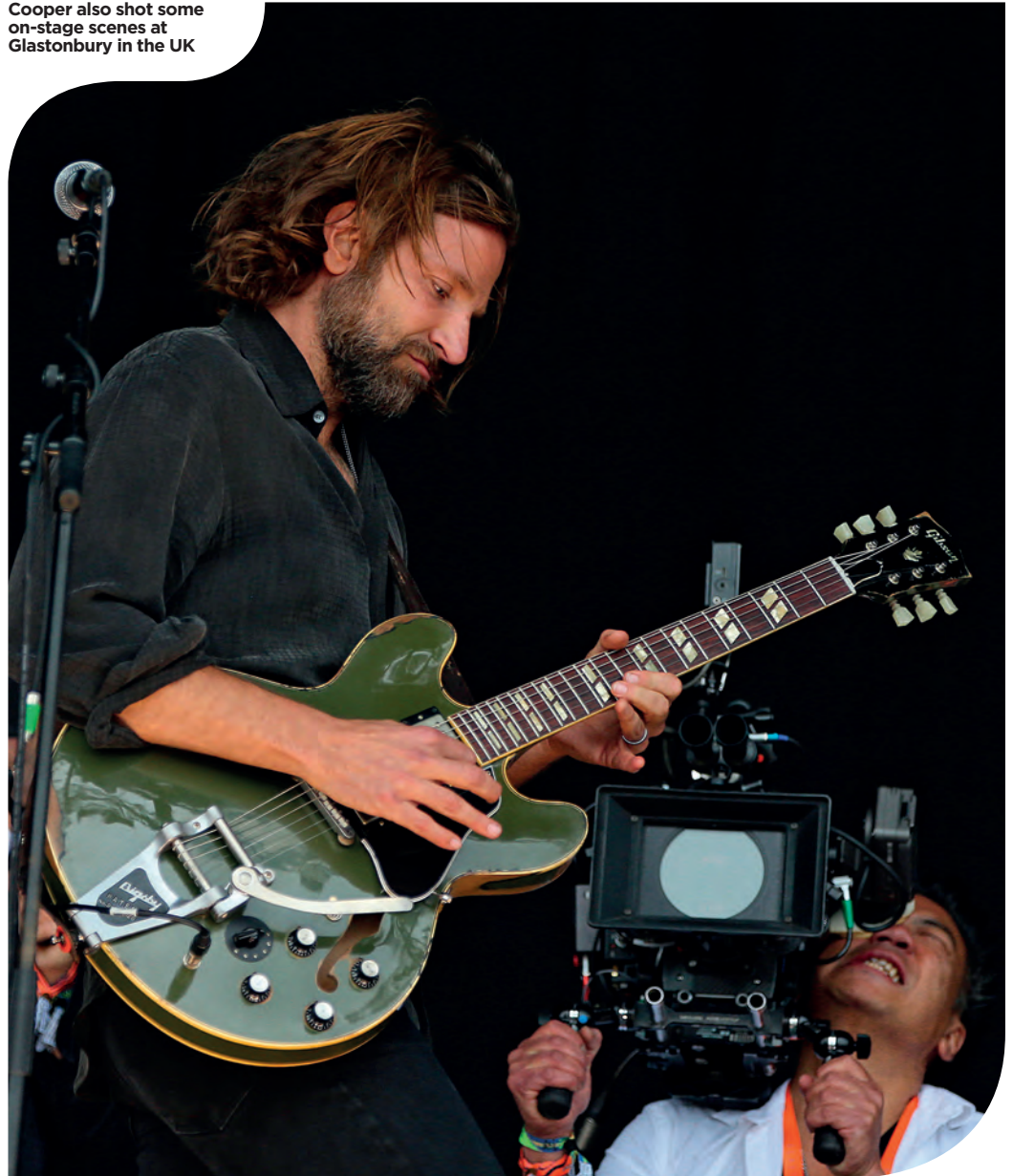
Additional crowd and stage scenes were shot with Cooper at the UK's Glastonbury festival in June 2017, just before Kris Kristofferson's live performance there. Metallica's Lars Ulrich helped with the filming.

"The reasons why we chose certain locations over others runs the gamut from aesthetic, to cost, to size, to permit and time restrictions, to desired time for dressing and striking, to location availability, to actor availability, to the schedule, to the length of the day or night, to the time of year," Schuler says. "It still strikes me as incredible that we were able to put all this together and come out with a product that can make people laugh, or cry, or challenge, or motivate."

The task of doubling the Palm Springs area for the Arizona countryside was not easy," Schuler says. "But the interior locations are much easier

**Rick Schuler:**  
*"Our budget could never have afforded even one of the amazing stages that we employed for the filming. Thank you Beyoncé!"*

Cooper also shot some on-stage scenes at Glastonbury in the UK



to cheat. For instance, the Greek Theatre was able to pass as an exterior venue in the Bay area because of the redwoods surrounding the artist entrance to the venue and by choosing not to shoot the stage in a way that would clearly identify the venue as a Los Angeles landmark. The interior architecture of a location is often the starting point that directs the audience to identify the setting. The Five Star Bar and the Regent in downtown Los Angeles are cases in point. The former passed for the Juke Joint in Memphis, the latter for a club in New Orleans." Schuler says the biggest challenge the production faced was the schedule, "which continued to change throughout the making of the entire film. Even on the last day, a lane closure was requested ... it was only when we heard 'That's a wrap' on the last day did we start to relax a bit." Another challenge was the need to shoot all night, with amplified sound, as they did at the Greek Theatre for four nights. "We invited Lady Gaga's fans — called Monsters — along with extras, to participate as the audience at most of the venues, ranging from 600 at The Regent to 2,000 at the Greek Theatre,"

Schuler says. The crew was also conscious of the impact of filming on residential neighborhoods — for example in Calabasas, where Bradley's character's house was situated, and Angelino Heights, the home of Lady Gaga's character. Paparazzi also posed a challenge.

A memorable moment for Schuler came during filming at the Stagecoach festival, during the build-up for Willie Nelson's set. "A young man dressed in a cowboy hat and boots approached the microphone and asked the crowd if it was OK if he jammed a bit with Willie's son, Lucas," Schuler says. "The crowd had no idea who this person was until he added: '... and by the way, my name is Bradley Cooper', to which the crowd went nuts with delight."

Cooper says that the live singing he had to do for the movie was much more difficult than he had expected it to be. "The amount of respect I have for singers, which I know is ridiculous because of course you should, but I've really been awakened to the phenomenon of singing. So I hope I can just be believable enough so that you can watch Stefani just shine, because she's incredible." ●



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# SELLING POINTS

Shoots for commercials and stills make up around 25% of California's yearly shoot days, as many producers, agencies and brands from around the world agree that the state provides the perfect backdrop for selling pretty much anything. **Gary Smith** reports

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Bodie State Historic Park, a genuine California gold-mining ghost town









**WITH** an audiovisual industry that dates back to 1910 and 840 miles of coastline, stretching from the Pacific Coast Ranges and the Klamath National Forest in the north to San Diego and the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park in the south, California offers a perfect package of creative possibilities. The state's unparalleled choice of locations includes impossibly huge redwood trees, ski runs, vineyards, deserts, wind farms, temperate fieldscapes, lagoons, tropical forests, other-worldly rock formations, pristine lakes and rivers, and thousands of miles of roads running through every kind of landscape imaginable.

Alongside that, there is its dramatic, larger-than-life coastline, interrupted by intimate sandy beaches, iconic bridges, and architecture ranging from castles and ranches to abandoned towns and picture-perfect suburbs. And then there's California's largely stable and agreeable climate and legendary quality of light. No wonder, then, that the state hosts hundreds of advertising shoots each year for clients from all over the Americas, as well as from Europe and Asia. The coastal county of San Luis Obispo is situated directly between Los Angeles and San Francisco. "Our region has a plethora of private ranches that have so many cool assets, from rock quarries to scary log cabins in the woods," says Kylee Corliss, film commission liaison for San Luis Obispo County. "They have private lakes, rolling hills, and dirt roads. One even has a Clydesdale ranch, where these wonderful horses are bred. Being private property, there are no filming permits required and filming only needs an agreement with the owners."

Hosting 15 to 20 commercials a year accounts for about 20%-25% of the county's shoots, with the majority consisting of car commercials. "Recently, one of our local location managers won an agency award for his work on a commercial for GMC, and I hear they are looking to come back and shoot another commercial because of the beautiful country roads and ranches we have available," Corliss adds.

Location scout Mark Zekanis takes up the story: "The GMC shoot was an epic undertaking because they were filming every current model and needed 17 different locations over 12 days. Added to that, they wanted fresh places that hadn't been used for car commercials

before — and, given the number of location changes, they also had to be close together."

Popular locations in San Luis Obispo County include the Oceano Dunes at Pismo State Beach. It is one of the only drive-on beaches in California, which makes it extremely popular for shoots. "It features rolling sand dunes, with the ocean in the background," Corliss says. "Another hot spot is Montaña de Oro State Park. The roads weave through ocean views of rocky coastline and wooded areas with trees overhanging the road. Again, it's very popular for car commercials."

And then there's the unique Madonna Inn. "I worked on a Microsoft campaign that used this amazing hotel," Zekanis says. "Its paint scheme features a lot of pink, alongside gold, green, and yellow. The dining room is just incredible. Every room is themed and different, plus it was built into the side of a hill, so many of the rooms have natural rock features. We also have Hearst Castle in San Simeon, which lies at the center of a huge and extremely varied ranch, on which there is also a 19th century white clapboard house."

Hearst Castle, which contains William Randolph Hearst's vast collection of memorabilia from his many trips around the world, is now run by the State of California in consultation with the Hearst family. "The ranch is a great location for a car commercial as it has amazing views through to the Pacific Ocean and San Simeon Pier," Zekanis adds.

According to Brandy Shimabukuro, filming program manager at the City of San Diego special events and filming department, San Diego hosts around 100 commercials shoots each year. They include campaigns for VW, Ford, HP, Honda, Acura, Chrysler, Lululemon, Audi, Ford, Kia, Alfa Romeo, HP, and Qualcomm, and constitute approxi-

#### KYLEE CORLISS

"The San Luis Obispo region has a plethora of private ranches that have so many cool assets, from rock quarries to scary log cabins in the woods"

mately 10% of the filming days permitted by the San Diego Film Office.

Shimabukuro says that one of her department's biggest challenges is keeping up with technology: "Drones, 360-degree cameras and other new equipment are making for incredible shots and new perspectives in commercials — aerial shots that previously would have been too costly and resource-intensive to be feasible on a commercials shoot are now fairly common thanks to drones."

The San Diego Film Office works closely with production companies, the San Diego Police Department, and other city authorities to enable production companies to achieve the best shots possible. "Each commercial shoot's needs are different," Shimabukuro adds. "Some are looking for Anywhere, USA, and others are looking for ▲






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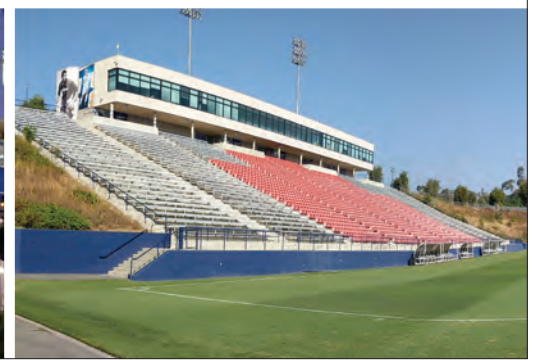
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Balboa Park Gardens, San Diego

a location that's distinctly San Diego. This region has no shortage of beautiful and unique locations, but two in particular are very popular with commercials shoots: Balboa Park and North Torrey Pines Road, just north of the Torrey Pines State Beach."

Balboa Park is a San Diego icon. Featuring architecture ranging from Spanish Renaissance to modern, it houses several world-renowned museums and institutions, including San Diego Zoo. "North Torrey Pines Road is a popular stretch of road for car commercials," Shimabukuro says. "The particular stretch that is used most is bounded by the section of road called South Camino Del Mar to the north, the Torrey Pines State Beach south parking-lot entrance to the south, Los Penasquitos Lagoon to the east, and the sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean along the Torrey Pines State Beach to the west."

Shimabukuro reports that another San Diego icon, the Coronado

Bridge, is also popular for car commercials because it stretches 2.1 miles from San Diego to Coronado and features a distinctive 80-degree curve.

The 50 or so commercials productions filmed in Mono County each year represent about 90% of total film production, making them the area's audiovisual staple. About a five-hour drive from Los Angeles, Mono County's dramatic Sierra Nevada mountains serve as the ideal backdrop for productions requiring magnificent alpine settings. "Locations that are repeatedly requested for commercials include the Benton Crossing road, just south of Mammoth Lakes," says Alicia Vennos, economic development director and film commissioner at the Mono County Film Commission. "It's popular for vehicle commercials all year round, because it's a wide open, quiet stretch of road with magnificent, looming views of the Sierra Nevada mountain range. Another popular location for ethereal or otherworldly landscapes is the Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve. The limestone formations, called 'tufa', give the vast lake a unique, almost haunted look and feel. Another beloved location is Minaret Vista — the jagged peaks of the minarets are truly iconic."

And then there's the snow. "Last year's ski season at Mammoth Mountain kicked off in early November and finished on August 16, which makes Mono County and Mammoth Lakes popular with productions needing snowy landscapes," Vennos says. "Mammoth Mountain received 40 feet of snow in the month of January alone last year, which presented some challenges for a Jeep commercial. Fortunately, the California Department of Transportation [Caltrans] and the county-road crews are true professionals, as are the Mammoth Location Services, and the production was successful." Mono County is 96% public land, the bulk of it managed by Inyo National Forest. "One time a production had forgotten to mention that a trained goat was going to be part of the talent," Vennos says. ▲

#### ALICIA VENNOS

"Last year's ski season kicked off in early November and finished on August 16. Mammoth Mountain received 40 feet of snow in the month of January alone"



“One little goat shouldn’t have been an issue but, because the Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep is an endangered species, the presence of domestic goats and sheep require additional permitting and investigation, because they can potentially expose the bighorn to disease. After that, I always ask if goats or sheep are part of a production — and I get the strangest looks.”

Equally, it isn’t hard to imagine the look on the face of Northern California location scout Jof Hanwright when he was asked to find a stretch of road by a river for a VW Alltrack commercial. “People don’t build roads next to rivers because they get washed away when it floods,” he says. “But part of my job is explaining the realities of requests, and then finding a creative solution.”

The commercial in question called for a bear to be eating a salmon as a VW drove past. “Clearly, staging a scenario with a bear catching a salmon was just not possible, so that part was taken care of through stock footage,” Hanwright explains. “But I managed to find a short stretch of track near enough to the American River, where there were spawning salmon, which worked for the director.”

Car commercials form a large percentage of California’s advertising shoots. Hanwright cites several locations that are on the way to becoming iconic: “Highway 1 runs up the West Coast from Mexico to Canada, and parts of it rival the high French Alps for vertiginous, beautiful roads. The section south of San Francisco, which includes Big Sur, is amazing. And then you have the Lake Tahoe basin and the Sierra Nevada, which can stand in for Colorado, Montana and even Wyoming. That’s especially handy these days, with budgets

BEVERLY LEWIS

“You can go from 90 feet to 9,000 feet in 90 minutes, which means you can really do it all. You still have snow on the mountains but, down below, it’s spring”

shrinking. Previously, if you needed to film different landscapes, you’d mount a road trip through Texas, Colorado and the Midwest. But for VW America, we managed to get that variety of looks between San Francisco Bay, Lake Tahoe, and Sacramento and Fresno. So within a four-hour radius, you can achieve the same as in a four week trip.”

Hanwright adds: “California is about diversity, diversity, and diversity — and Northern California offers an amazing visual variety. Then there’s the City of San Francisco, which is one of the most unique urban areas I’ve come across. It’s a truly special city, like London or New York. I’m also in love with the redwoods of the north-west and the deserts of the south-east.”

Northern California offers snow for six months of the year on the ski slopes above the pristine waters of Lake Tahoe, as well as on the Midwest/European-looking flatlands around Sacramento: “You can

go from 90 feet to 9,000 feet in 90 minutes, which means you get an astonishing variety of landscapes within a relatively short journey on the highway,” says Beverly Lewis, director of the Placer - Lake Tahoe Film Commission.

Both Placer and El Dorado counties can offer four seasons in one shoot, Lewis adds: “Especially around the months of April and May, you can really do it all. You still have plenty of snow on the mountains but, down below, it’s spring and there are lots of green shoots and flowers. You can then head to some of the private properties that we have available in the old Gold Rush area around Auburn and Newcastle, and make a summer scenario. And the autumn look can be done by adding some red and yellow leaves to the trees.”

Placer and Lake Tahoe’s other unique selling points are accessibility to the majority of locations, thanks to the state’s long, thin shape, and huge private properties, such as Foresthill and Horseshoe Bar Fish and Game Preserve. Foresthill includes a section of the Middle Fork of the American River, with its famous rapids and legendary Tunnel Chute, as well as a section of terrain that looks thoroughly tropical. “There’s a cliff covered in moss and large ferns and palms, which was used in the film *Dragonfly* (2002) with Kevin Costner, where it doubled as Venezuela,” Lewis says. “And then on the same property, there are grass and flower meadows, and an old log cabin. And you can easily access both sides of the river, which is important for a lot of shoots. Given all that rugged variety, we tend to host a lot of SUV shoots. Recently, we’ve had the VW Alltrack, the Jeep Grand Cherokee, the Toyota RAV4 and the Nissan Infiniti in the county.” Across the state and sandwiched between San Francisco and Palo Alto lies San Mateo County, where around 40% of the shoots consist of commercials. Last year, a Lincoln Navigator campaign asked to film at the Pigeon Point Lighthouse in Pescadero. San Mateo County film commissioner Marie Ivich takes up the story: “Pigeon Point Lighthouse is a popular spot for boat and car commercials and, in spring, it’s surrounded by flowers. But to get a filming permit, you need to speak to several entities, which complicates the process. Added to that, last winter was very wet indeed, which meant that the region’s park rangers were really busy dealing with the aftermath of that. And then we heard back from the rangers that they were doubtful as to whether they could provide us with anyone for the shoot. But the permits were done and the crew was already on its way. The park-ranger service knows how important shoots are to the county, so they eventually found a way to assign a ranger to the shoot.”

San Mateo County also includes Silicon Valley, some classic redwoods, a log cabin on private property, winding country roads around Pescador, the coast-hugging Highway 1 and San Gregorio State Beach, where the San Gregorio Creek empties into the sea. “Just inland from Highway 1, close to the San Mateo County Community College, is very popular for car shoots, and the owner of the property with the redwoods hosts a lot of commercials,” Ivich adds. “We also have the beautiful red-brick Filoli mansion and its exceptional gardens, and Stanford University Avenue, which is lined with really beautiful homes.”

Cassandra Hesseltine is president of Film Liaisons In California Statewide (FLICS), which brings together the resources of 41 film commissions around the state to offer assistance and help with permits for every kind of audiovisual project. The FLICS concept works, Hesseltine says, because California is so varied that the individual commissions do not feel they are in competition with one another. “Thirty minutes inland or 30 minutes north and you’re ▲



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somewhere entirely different, which precludes the competitive aspects of vying for shoots,” she adds. “And ultimately we are stronger together. Had we not been so united we would never have got the tax incentive passed. That rebate has brought a lot of film and TV shoots back to California and we are also seeing more commercials being filmed here, even though they don’t currently benefit from the incentive.”

Hesseltine is also film commissioner for Humboldt-Del Norte, known as the Redwood Coast, where a three-day shoot in August on the popular Trinidad State Beach encountered a seasonal challenge. “At that time of year, with the long days and amazing sunsets, the beaches are busy and the crew, who wanted to make a 360-degree film of a deserted beachscape, couldn’t get what they wanted,” Hesseltine says. “But given its size, plus the rocky and twisting nature of the beach, all they had to do was move around the corner to what is, in fact, the most beautiful part to get their people-free shots.”

The Humboldt-Del Norte area also has several other popular locations, including the Avenue of the Giants, Redwood National Park and Moonstone Beach. “Moonstone is great for car shoots,” Hesseltine says. “The parking lot is right by the beach, which is very long, so you can shoot cars on it. It’s also sandy and rocky, and it has a small river, which empties into the sea. There’s a lot going on there.”

Two world famous locations fall within the Monterey County boundaries, namely Big Sur and Bixby Bridge. The county also includes an 80-mile stretch of Highway 1 that has been designated a National Scenic Byway. “The scenery has been described as the most perfect meeting of land, sea and cliffs,” says Karen Nordstrand, director of marketing and film production at Monterey County Film Commission. “Then we have Bixby Bridge, which is one of the tallest concrete span bridges in the world, sitting 280 feet above Bixby

Creek and spanning a 700-foot ravine. And there are several state parks dotted along the highway.”

Thanks to these assets, Monterey is popular for car commercials and has recently hosted shoots by Audi, Lexus, Subaru and Michelin. “Some of them come for a simple image of a car on Bixby Bridge, others are looking for intermittent traffic control, and some prefer the north end of the bridge, where it is joined by the Old Coast Road,” Nordstrand says.

Some less well-known Monterey locations are also much in demand, Nordstrand adds: “Bentley filmed on Pebble Beach and Pacific Grove, a small city on the Monterey Peninsula that is also popular for car shoots. We regularly have crews making commercials for Visit California as well. But it’s not just about the coast here. We also have the Salinas Valley, known as the lettuce bowl of the world, plus several private ranches that are easy to make over with a period look if needed. Salinas Valley, Carmel Valley and River Road also regularly double for Europe. And in Monterey itself, we have Fisherman’s Wharf, Cannery Row, and streets of Victorian houses.”

Some 300 miles south of Big Sur lies Santa Clarita, close to but not part of Los Angeles. During 2017, Santa Clarita County hosted 159 shoot days for commercials including Enterprise Rent-a-Car, Keurig, Pepsi, Nissan, Target, and the Samsung Galaxy. One of the most in-demand locations is the College of the Canyons, whose sprawling campus combines a clean, minimalist look with sports fields and nature. “The Nissan commercial was shot on one of the college’s playing fields,” says Evan Thomason, economic development associate at the Santa Clarita Film Commission. “It featured Heisman Trophy winners — college football’s most valuable players — tackling an obstacle course and playing football using the cars. The campus, which doesn’t have much signage, has also doubled as the CIA’s headquarters in Langley, and hosted shoots for the Ford

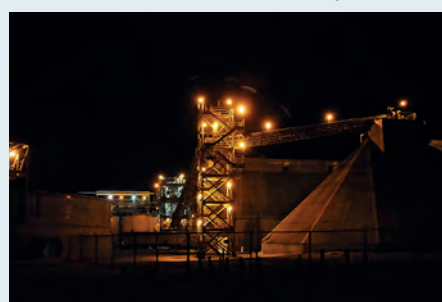


## BODIE STATE HISTORIC PARK

**BODIE** State Historic Park is a genuine California gold-mining ghost town. “It had its heyday in the late 1870s and has more than 200 original buildings in a state of arrested decay that are still standing,” says photographer Jeff Sullivan. “Bodie has provided an authentic ghost-town backdrop for many commercials, documentaries, feature films and music videos over the years.”

## TRONA

**BACK** in 1914, Trona had a population of around 7,000. Today, there are less than 1,000 people in the former mining town. “When they built the naval base in Ridgecrest, the population shifted over there, leaving Trona largely uninhabited,” says location manager Geoff Jukes. “It offers lots of locations, including an airport, empty swimming pools, and abandoned houses. But there are also unusual rock formations and some great mountain roads, such as Donner Pass, which features a beautiful bridge with a lake in the background. It’s also on the way to Death Valley, and close to Ballarat, where cult leader Charles Manson was caught. Chevrolet, Honda and Kia have all shot around there.”



## CARSON MANSION

**“WILLIAM** Carson’s home in Eureka is considered the finest example of high Victorian architecture in the country,” says Humboldt-Del Norte location scout Patti Stammer. Designed for the lumber baron by San Francisco architects Samuel and Joseph Newsom in the 1880s, the 35-room mansion took more than 100 men and over two years to construct. Carson Mansion is said to be the most photographed Victorian house in the US.



EVE HONTHANER

“Our motto is that California is the world in one place.”

F-150, Alfa Romeo, the NBA, and Old Spice.”

Given its year-round good weather and plethora of photogenic roads, Santa Clarita is also very popular with car shoots. “Hyundai, Toyota, Honda, and Subaru have all shot here,” Thomason says.

The region also has several movie ranches, including Disney’s Golden Oak Ranch and the Blue Cloud Movie Ranch. Other assets include skating rink Ice Station Valencia, where Enterprise Rent-a-Car recently shot, and Castaic Lake, where commercials for Blue Diamond Almonds and Truly Spiked & Sparkling have been filmed. According to California Film Commission deputy director Eve Honthaner, and senior permit co-ordinator Eric Klosterman, one of the state’s stand-out shoots of this year was a Red Bull spot. “It was shot on the Golden Gate Bridge and featured a Red Bull F1 car, which did a pit stop on the bridge,” Klosterman says.

“It’s not easy to set up traffic control on the bridge, but location manager Scott Logan, along with Caltrans and the bridge authorities did an amazing job,” Honthaner adds. “We’ve been hosting Nissan and Toyota regularly for many years, as well as shoots from France, the UK and Australia. There are also a lot of still photography shoots around the redwoods. And we have unique, other-worldly places like

Trona, where 80% of the houses have been abandoned but are still semi-intact. The area around the town is mined for the 95 mineral elements that occur naturally there, and there’s a huge chemical processing plant running 24 hours per day. Our motto is that California is the world in one place.”

Of course, shutting down roads in the city of Los Angeles is challenging, but it can be done. “The downtown area around Grand Avenue and Lower Grand Avenue is very controllable,” Klosterman says. “You can even have artificial rain there if you want. Then heading out of town, there’s one of my favorites — the Angeles Crest Highway, which runs along the top of several mountains between L.A. and Lancaster.”

Up in Marin County, a short drive from San Francisco, 75% of shoots consist of commercials. “Marin is a very outdoor place and you can easily find pristine, uninterrupted natural spots here,” says Marin County film commissioner Deborah Albre. “As you come off the north end of the Golden Gate Bridge and take the first exit, you’re in the National Recreation Area and heading into the hills. But it’s not all nature. We also have WW II bunkers, a fully restored Nike missile site, and a variety of views of the bridge and the San Francisco skyline from Conzelman Road. You can find enormous variety in a short distance.”

With its six state and three national parks, Marin County offers great outdoor locations — smart fitness-tracker company Fitbit, unsurprisingly, is a regular. “We’ve also hosted shoots for the McLaren supercar, plus Subaru, VW, GMC, and Volvo,” Albre adds. “SUVs love the Samuel P Taylor State Park because it’s easy to get the ‘car by a campfire’ shot. It also offers picnic areas, creeks and redwood trees. Larger shoots can easily be accommodated thanks to the huge parking area at Olompali State Historical Park, which is regularly used as a staging area for trucks.” ●

## STONE LAGOON

**STONE** Lagoon was recently used to stand in for Scotland for a Johnnie Walker campaign. “They landed a sea plane with fishing gear at sunrise,” says Humboldt-Del Norte location scout Patti Stammer. “Stone Lagoon was also used for the Maglite calendar for Japan. Another calendar, for fast-food chain Chick-fil-A, was shot in Humboldt. It showed cows on vacation asking everyone to eat more chicken.”



## LOS ANGELES

**FILM** and TV director John Singleton recently shot a commercial for global infrastructure company AECOM in Los Angeles. The locations included a house in the south of city, the subway and Venice Beach. “The biggest challenge was not having enough time for the shots in the subway train,” says

## SEQUOIA PARK

**LOCATED** in the heart of the city of Eureka, Sequoia Park it is a multi-use location. “I’ve filmed here almost as often as in the fabled Avenue of the Giants,” says Humboldt-Del Norte location scout Patti Stammer. “We’ve shot in the park for Apple, GM, and Southern Energy, as well as the *Jurassic Park* VR promo for Comic-Con and dozens of print layouts. Last year *A Wrinkle in Time* filmed in Sequoia Park and Patrick’s Point State Park for three months.”

executive producer Tracy Mays of The Bigger Picture. “We only had three hours, so we ended up finishing that scene off in a stationary train.” Mays has 20 years of experience of shooting commercials in California. “There’s more variety across the state than you’d ever imagine, and the crews are the absolute best, as you would expect,” she says.





# MAKING A SCENE In a Galaxy not so far away...



When Pacific Rim Films agreed to make a *Star Wars*-inspired commercial for the Nissan Rogue SUV, the L.A.-based production company didn't realize it would first have to cope with the vast numbers at an annual sheriffs' picnic... Gary Smith reports

**T**HE NISSAN commercial, '*Jedi Learner Driver*', features the Nissan Rogue SUV's driver-assistance technology, ProPILOT Assist, which helps to keep the driver centered in her lane as she is distracted by space craft from the Lucasfilm movie, *Star Wars: Episode VIII The Last Jedi* (2017). Nissan is one of the six brand partners for *Star Wars: Episode VIII The Last Jedi*, and given that the spot puts the Nissan Rogue in the middle of a fight between the Rebel Alliance and the Empire, it's perhaps unsurprising that the shoot itself was something of a challenge. Producer Pacific Rim Films approached the Riverside County Film Commission with a request to close a section of the County's remote Domenigoni Parkway for three days. Riverside County film commissioner Bettina Breckenfeld takes up the story: "They needed to have the freeway shut down for that long so they could

build an obstacle course. They needed traffic cones, construction vehicles and dirt ramps for the Nissan Rogue and its navigation system to deal with."

So far, so possible — except that Breckenfeld received the request to shut down the freeway a mere two weeks before the proposed shoot: "We received it on a Friday," she says. "A request like that, which requires permits from three different agencies — state, county and city — can take up to three months. So first thing on Monday morning we were waiting outside the door of the West County Transportation Agency, while location scout John Rizzi was simultaneously talking to the state and city transportation departments. That way, we were able to let the county department know that the other two agencies believed it to be possible, even in such a limited time."

Riverside County Film Commission has a database of contacts for various departments and other county agencies, which it uses to help in expediting the permitting process. "And at the state transport department we had a stroke of luck in that one of the people we were dealing with was familiar with the project — as it had already been denied permission to film elsewhere in the state — so that speeded things up."

The isolated nature of Domenigoni Parkway made it the perfect site. "These days, car shoots are always a target for industrial espionage, so the more remote a location, the better," Breckenfeld

says. "We were also going to have to close down several access points to and from the freeway, plus some local sections of road. All that had been put in place when we were informed that, during the shoot, the police department would be holding its annual sheriff's picnic at the Diamond Valley Lake right next door, and that the many cars expected would normally use one of the roads we had shut down for access."

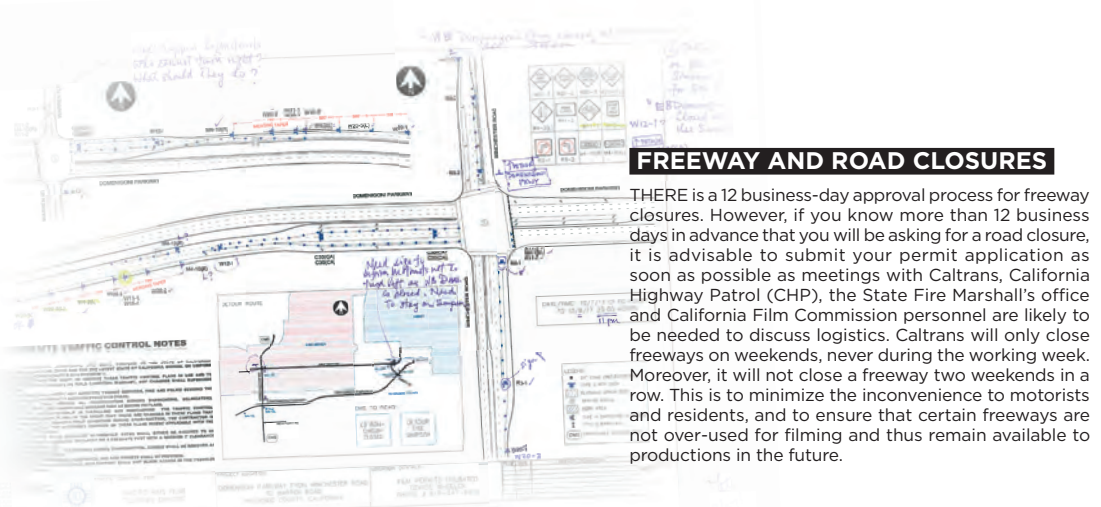
**Bettina Breckenfeld**  
*"These days, car shoots are always a target for industrial espionage, so the more remote a location, the better"*



## MAKING A SCENE JEDI



Fortunately, Breckenfeld found an alternative way for the police to reach their lake-side picnic site: “We worked out that the majority of the cars would be coming from the east of the county and, thankfully, that turned out to be the case. Based on that calculation, we managed to get all the cars in and out with no disruption to the shoot.” The result was a spectacular commercial in which the Nissan Rogue’s driver successfully navigates an onslaught of enemy AT-ATs and Chicken Walkers — superimposed over the obstacle course — using the car’s driver-assistance technology. Good triumphs over evil once again. ●





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## DOWNTOWN PALM SPRINGS

Downtown Palm Springs offers several different looks to filmmakers. Period productions love filming here as it provides an authentic mid-century look, and there is also Spanish and Mediterranean architecture to choose from. Palm Springs is a desert resort in Riverside County within the Coachella Valley. Establishing shots for *Just Getting Started* (2017) with Morgan Freeman and Tommy Lee Jones, were filmed here. (Photo courtesy, Greater Palm Springs Convention & Visitors Bureau)

# CALIFORNIA IN PICTURES

WITH THE HELP OF FILM COMMISSIONS, PHOTOGRAPHERS  
AND LOCATION MANAGERS, LOCATION CALIFORNIA TAKES  
A TOUR OF THE STRIKING AND DIVERSE LOCATIONS ON  
OFFER IN THE GOLDEN STATE







### MOSSBRAE FALLS, DUNSMUIR

Mossbrae Falls is a waterfall flowing into the Sacramento River, in the Shasta Cascade area in Dunsmuir, California. The waterfall is true to its name in that it is a section of cliff draped in moss where springs percolate and fall among the greenery. The famous train bridge scene in the movie *Stand By Me* (1986) was filmed nearby on the trestle over Lake Britton, part of the Great Shasta Rail Trail. (Photo, courtesy Patrick J. Desmond)











## POLSA ROSA MOVIE STUDIO RANCH, ACTON

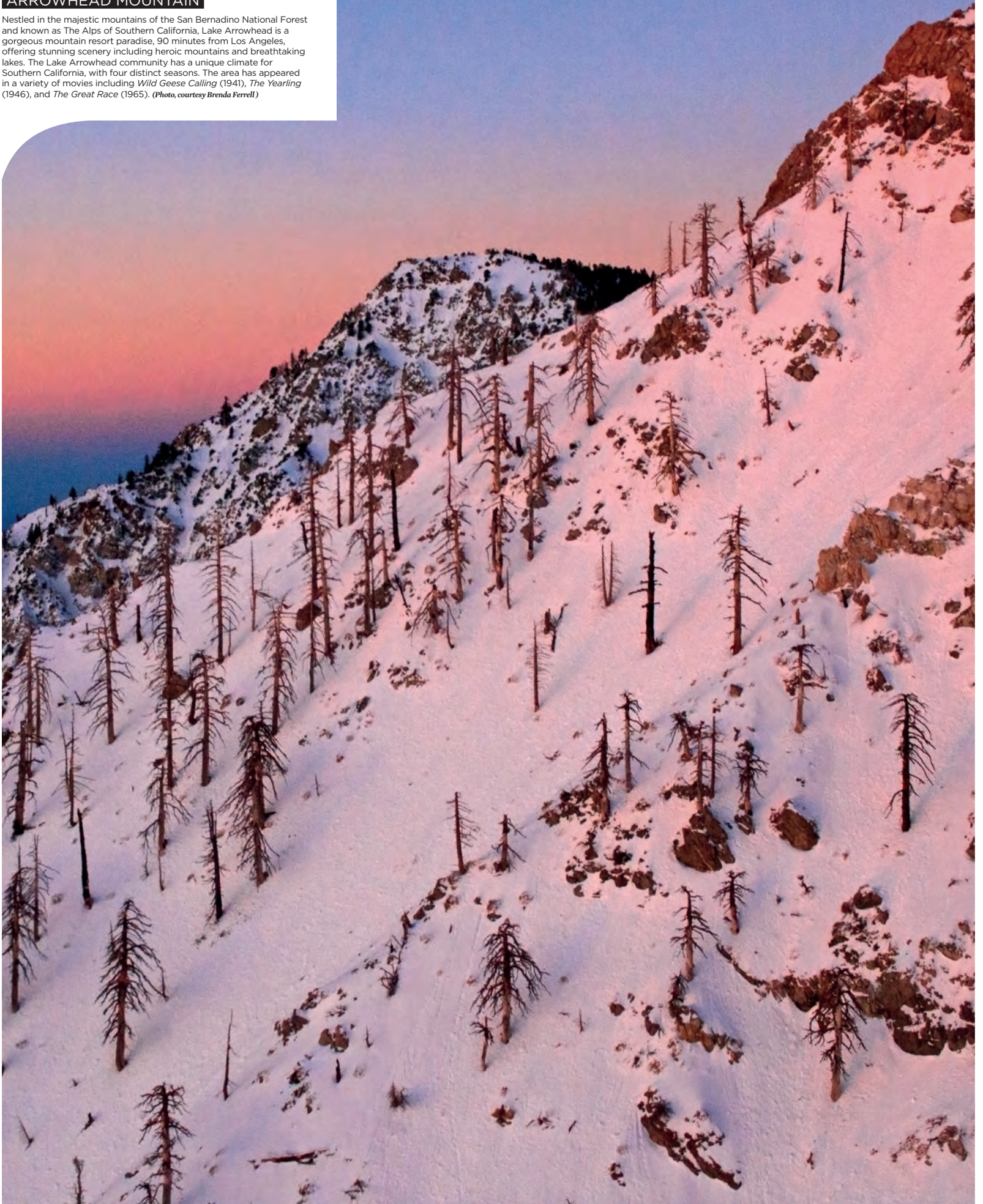
Located in the 30-mile zone along the Santa Clara River and bordering the mountains of the Angeles National Forrest, Polsa Rosa Movie Studio Ranch offers over 700 acres of privately owned land with a widely varied terrain and landscapes. This historic film location has been the site for movies including *Red Dawn* (2012), *The Lone Ranger* (2013) *Windtalkers* (2002), and *Adaptation* (2002). Some of the underwater sinking ship scenes in *Titanic* (1997) were filmed on the property in a specially constructed pool. Recent TV projects include *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017). (Photo, courtesy Christian Fescher)





## ARROWHEAD MOUNTAIN

Nestled in the majestic mountains of the San Bernadino National Forest and known as The Alps of Southern California, Lake Arrowhead is a gorgeous mountain resort paradise, 90 minutes from Los Angeles, offering stunning scenery including heroic mountains and breathtaking lakes. The Lake Arrowhead community has a unique climate for Southern California, with four distinct seasons. The area has appeared in a variety of movies including *Wild Geese Calling* (1941), *The Yearling* (1946), and *The Great Race* (1965). (Photo, courtesy Brenda Ferrell)







## BASS LAKE JULY 4TH FIREWORKS, YOSEMITE

Bass Lake is a pine-trimmed reservoir about a half-hour's drive south of Yosemite National Park's south entrance. Situated in central California, Bass Lake and its surroundings offer beautiful lakefront vistas, a range of easy-access filming locations, a film-friendly community and plenty of activities that take place on the lake. Films shot here include: *The Great Outdoors* (1988), *The Giant of Thunder Mountain* (1991), *Meatballs 4* (1992), and *Mouse Hunt* (1997).  
*(Photo, courtesy Darwin Atkeson, Yosemite Landscapes)*







## LARKSPUR, MARIN COUNTY

This image of the old-town district of Larkspur was taken looking south on Magnolia Street. Designated a state and city historic district, the downtown area is about a half-mile long, from the Lark Theater in the foreground, to the charming Perry's on Magnolia, a restaurant much-loved by locals and visitors. It is officially listed on the National Register of Historic Places, because the buildings are representative of commercial architecture that was typical of small California towns at the turn of the century. Magnolia Avenue looks much as it did when it was the main county road around 1908. The false-front store façades, the Mission-Revival-style church and City Hall, the early Queen Anne Victorian houses, and the Blue Rock Inn, all evoke the flavor of the city's past. The TV series *13 Reasons Why* (2017-) recently filmed in a close-by residential area of Larkspur. Other productions shot here include *Dirty Harry* (1971), *Mother* (1996), and *Blue Jasmine* (2013). The area is also used regularly in corporate and visitor information videos and still-photography shoots.

(Photo, courtesy Marin Convention & Visitors Bureau and Film Resource Office)







#### BLUFF COVE, PALOS VERDES ESTATES

Bluff Cove offers privacy and can easily pass for an east-coast or island beach. At low tide, the shoreline is accessible in both directions to various tide pool spots. Heading south beyond Bluff Cove is the Palos Verdes Estates Shoreline Preserve, which leads all the way to Palos Verdes Point where an old shipwreck is rusting on the beach. This path from Bluff Cove to the wreck has been nicknamed the Shipwreck Hiking Trail. This is a filmic gem just waiting to be discovered.

*(Photo, courtesy Brenda Ferrell)*



## PORT OF LOS ANGELES

The Port of Los Angeles, also known as America's Port, is a port complex that occupies 7,500 acres of land and water along 43 miles of waterfront, adjoining the separate Port of Long Beach. The port is located in San Pedro Bay in the San Pedro and Wilmington neighborhoods of Los Angeles, approximately 20 miles south of downtown. This picture was taken in the port of Los Angeles from the Tall Ship Exy Johnson. Many locations, both in Port of Los Angeles and the Port of Long Beach, feature industrial cranes. Many films and commercials have shot in both ports, many of them using the area's industrial-anywhere look. (Photo, courtesy Barbara J Miller, LMGI)









## MAD RIVER BEACH COUNTY PARK, HUMBOLDT COUNTY

Mad River Beach County Park is located where Mad River approaches the ocean, a few miles south of the actual river mouth. The location provides great ocean beach access and a safe protected boat launch area. This is a rural, sparsely populated area with easy access and just five minutes from the nearby town, which has good hotel accommodation. A commercial for Chevrolet shot here recently.

*(Photo, courtesy Andy Rydzewski)*





## CORONADO BRIDGE IN THE SAN DIEGO BAY

The Coronado Bridge stretches 2.1 miles from San Diego to Coronado and features a distinctive 80° curve. The bridge and San Diego Bay offer sweeping views of the region from Downtown San Diego to Chula Vista. The ease of working with the California Film Commission and Caltrans for permitting; proximity to San Diego International Airport; many lodging and dining options; parking facilities for base camp and production vehicles; and major freeways, make filming at the Coronado Bridge particularly film-friendly. Productions shot here include: *Simon & Simon* (1981-1989), *K-9* (1989), and *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy* (2004). (Photo, courtesy Arash Afshar)







## RED ROCK CANYON STATE PARK, KERN COUNTY

Red Rock Canyon State Park features scenic desert cliffs, buttes and spectacular rock formations. The park is located where the southernmost tip of the Sierra Nevada converges with the El Paso Mountains. Carved by wind and water, the land unfolds in layers of white, pink, and red. The many Westerns filmed here include *The Outlaw* (1943) and *The Big Country* (1958). *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (1970), *Westworld* (1973), *Jurassic Park* (1993), *The Mummy* (1999), *Savages* (2012), and TV series *Lost in Space* (1965-68) and *Airwolf* (1984-1986) also shot here. (Photo, courtesy Tyler Algozzino)











## TREASURE LAKES, LITTLE LAKES VALLEY

Situated in the John Muir Wilderness of the Inyo National Forest, the Treasure Lakes trail leads to a beautiful granite basin surrounded by talus slopes at the foot of Mount Thompson, Mount Goode and Hurd Peak. Western films shot here include *Ride the High Country* (1962), *Nevada Smith* (1966), *Will Penny* (1968), *Joe Kidd* (1972), and *High Plains Drifter* (1973). It was a location for the 1998 sci-fi film *Star Trek Insurrection*, and the BBC's *Walking with Monsters*. (Photo, courtesy Zachary Algozzino)





## HALF MOON BAY STATE BEACH, SAN MATEO COUNTY

Just off Highway One at Half Moon Bay, four small beaches stretching south from Montara Mountain form the gentle two-mile curve of fine, white sand that is Half Moon Bay State Beach. This is a popular location for commercials, print, TV and movies and is featured in *Harold and Maude* (1971), *Final Analysis* (1992), *American Wedding* (2003), *House of Sand and Fog* (2003), *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005), and *Chasing Mavericks* (2012).

(Photo, courtesy San Mateo County Film Commission by Pranz Tavu-Tullao)





#### CONVICT LAKE, MONO COUNTY

Just two miles off the scenic US Highway 395, Convict Lake is one of the most accessible and dramatically photogenic lakes in California. The towering, multi-layered cliffs of Laurel Mountain and Mount Morrison are imposing and statuesque enough to cheat almost any mountainous location in the world; and the deep waters of the lake seem to change from turquoise to indigo to slate-green sometimes within an hour. Countless commercials and many movies have filmed at Convict Lake, including *The Return of Frank James* (1940) with Henry Fonda; *How the West Was Won* (1962) with Jimmy Stewart and John Wayne; and several scenes for *Star Trek: Insurrection* (1998). (Photo, courtesy David Shield)











**STONEPINE ESTATE RESORT  
EQUESTRIAN CENTRE, CARMEL VALLEY,  
MONTEREY COUNTY**

The Stonepine Estate Resort Equestrian Center has a Ralph Lauren feel. The 330-acre Stonepine Estate property was renamed after the towering 80-foot Italian Stone Pines, which were planted from 18-inch saplings more than 50 years ago. The resulting look is more reminiscent of Tuscany than Northern California. This was the setting for Arnold Schwarzenegger when he played a pregnant woman getting ready to give birth in *Junior* (1994). (Photo, courtesy Karen Nordstrand/Monterey County Film Commission)



A nighttime photograph of the San Francisco skyline taken from a high vantage point, likely a penthouse. The view is framed by a decorative, light-colored metal railing with a repeating circular pattern in the foreground. The city lights are visible in the background, with the Transamerica Pyramid being the most prominent building on the left. The sky is dark, and the city lights create a warm, golden glow.

## THE FAIRMONT HOTEL PENTHOUSE SUITE, SAN FRANCISCO

This iconic view of the San Francisco Skyline was taken from the Fairmont Hotel. The historic five-star luxury hotel, at the top of Nob Hill, was named after mining magnate and U.S. senator James Graham Fair (1831-94), by his daughters. The hotel has been featured in many films, including *The Rock* (1996). Exterior and interior shots of the hotel were used as stand-ins for the fictional St. Gregory Hotel in the television series *Hotel* (1983-88). The Venetian Room at the Fairmont Hotel was where Tony Bennett first sang *I Left My Heart In San Francisco* in December 1961. (Photo, courtesy Peter J. Martorano)





#### SACRAMENTO RIVER, REDDING

The Sacramento River is the largest river in California. Rising in the Klamath Mountains, it flows south for 400 miles before reaching the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and San Francisco Bay. Spanning the Sacramento River, the Sundial Bridge is a suspension bridge that also acts as a huge, working sundial. Redding is the county seat of Shasta County and offers diverse locations in a close proximity. There is little traffic in the area and minimum red tape for productions wishing to shoot here. The location is eligible for the local film incentive.

*(Photo, courtesy Gene Knaebel)*



## LONG BEACH, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

The downtown area pictured here offers two parks, a marina, a beach, tall buildings, plenty of parking for base camp and crew, and generally amazing views. In the picture can be seen the iconic Queen Mary, the Aquarium of the Pacific, Shoreline Village, Shoreline Marina, The Pike and the Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center. Features shot here include: *C.H.I.P.S.* (2017) and *Den of Thieves* (2018) and yet-to-be-released *Fighting with my Family* and *Peppermint*. TV shows include: *New Girl* (2011-), *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (2013-), *Jane the Virgin* (2014-), *Baller* (2015-), *Rosewood* (2015-17), *Baskets* (2016-), and *9-1-1* (2018-). (Photo, courtesy Liesl Estipona / Long Beach Special Events & Filming)







## ROSSLYN HOTEL, DOWNTOWN LA

This picture shows 5th Street at Main Street, as seen from the roof of The King Edward Hotel. The Hotel Rosslyn Annex is a historic building built in 1923 at the corner of 5th and Main streets. The building is across the street from the original 800-room Rosslyn Hotel, built in 1914. Designed as a twin with the King Edward Hotel, both were topped by mammoth glowing signs featuring the hotels' names surrounded by a heart, the shape acknowledging the Hart brothers who owned the hotels. The 264-unit building was renovated to house a mix of homeless veterans, low-income- and market-rate tenants. Many films and commercials have featured these iconic signs of the old Hotel Rosslyn, for a generic, historic urban look, with a bit of a New York feel. *Million Dollar Hotel* (2000) shot here. (Photo, courtesy Barbara J Miller, LMGI)

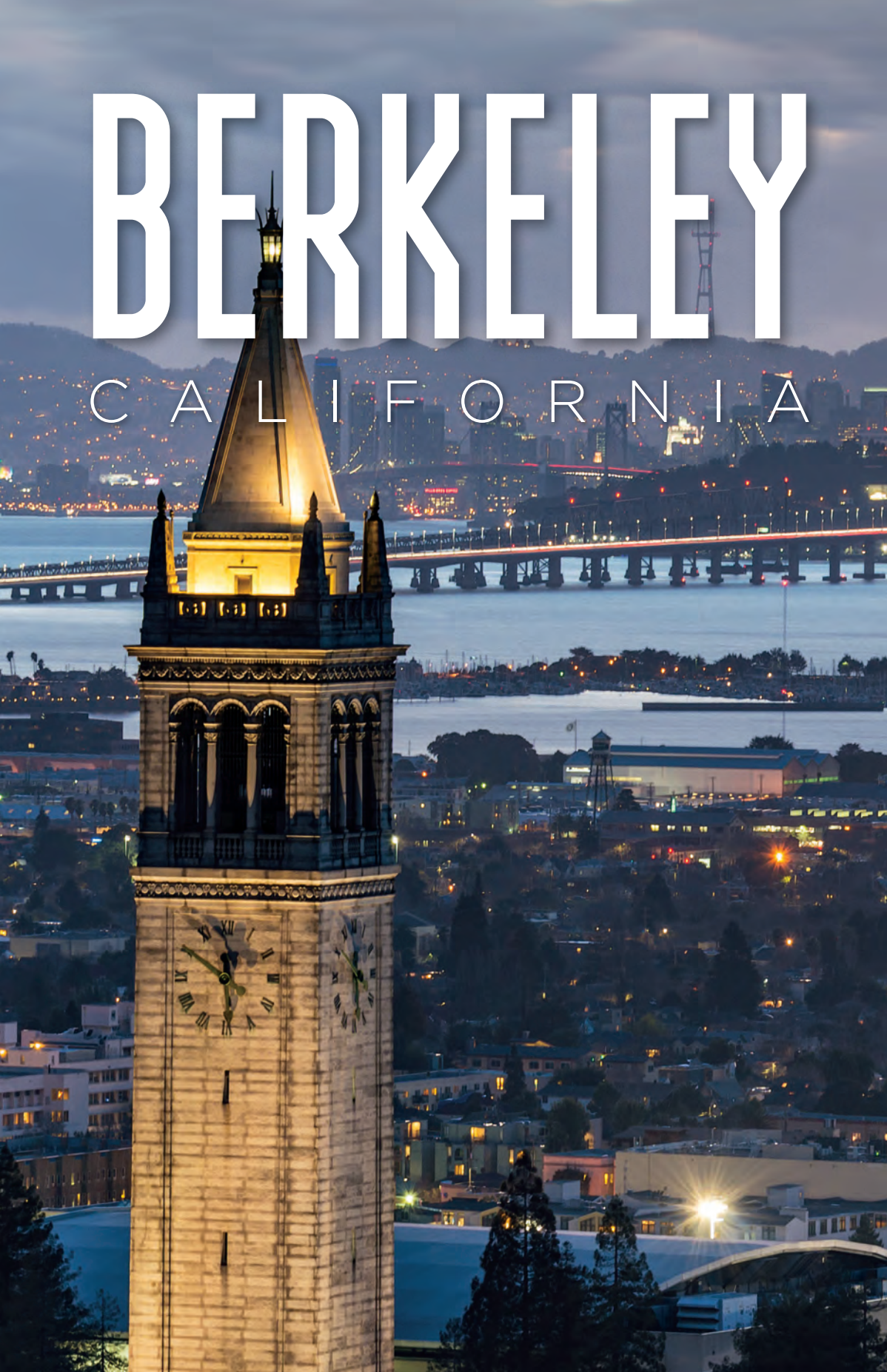






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Orc cop and human cop:  
Joel Edgerton and  
Will Smith in *Bright*

# The MAKING A SCENE Bright side of L.A.



Having reinvented the way in which people watch TV, SVOD platform Netflix is now intent on disrupting the movie business. Andy Fry and Julian Newby look at one of the first projects off the blocks — the \$90M fantasy/action hybrid *Bright*

**N**O LONGER satisfied with playing second fiddle to the theatrical release window, Netflix is investing big bucks in blockbuster movies that it will premiere on its own platform. One high-profile film to emerge from this new initiative is fantasy/action hybrid *Bright* (2017), starring Will Smith, Joel Edgerton and Noomi Rapace. Directed by David Ayer (*Suicide Squad*/2016) and written by Max Landis (*Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*/2016-17), the film imagines a modern-day Los Angeles in which orcs, elves, centaurs, and fairies, and other supernatural beings live alongside humans. Smith, a human, and Edgerton, an orc, play LAPD cops — and in a clever twist, it is Edgerton's orc cop who is subjected to discrimination. Smith says that the experience of filming *Bright* was unique because it provided a rare opportunity for him to play an African-American who is prejudiced. "We did ride-alongs with the LAPD and sheriffs," he says. "As an African-American, it was a different perspective for me to be in the back of cars riding around with police officers in Los Angeles in predominantly black and Hispanic neighborhoods and seeing the complexities from the other side. It was spectacular for me, an African-American, playing a police officer who's racist against the first orc on the



force. It's like the flip of those social concepts. As a black dude, you don't get a lot of movies where you're the racist."

If orcs are the new black in *Bright's* dark and dangerous Los Angeles, then the elite are the elves. Smith and Edgerton start out as antagonists, but slowly start to respect each other as they work together to protect young elf Tikka (Lucy Fry), who is trying to recover an all-powerful wand that has been stolen from her, while being pursued by the destructive renegade elf Leilah (Noomi Rapace).

"*Bright* is about an incredible friendship under extraordinary circumstances," director David Ayer says. "More than anything, it's about two guys who become friends as they go through hell together."

## Will Smith: "As a black dude, you don't get a lot of movies where you're the racist"

Ayer is no stranger to making movies in L.A., the city that he has called home since his teens. And it was important that it looked as real as possible in order that everything else that was going on in the film was believable. "*Bright* takes place in this interesting heightened reality," he says. "At the core, it's about Los Angeles, and it's important to shoot the city as the city. This movie is all about reality. These characters don't know that orcs aren't real, that fairies aren't real. They don't know that magic isn't real. But at the same time, there are these fantasy elements. It was important to me to create that seamless environment." However, he acknowledges that navigating his way through its rapidly changing cityscape was challenging. "We'd go to places to film, and the wrecking ball would be waiting. The warehouse district downtown, which used to be where you shoot machine guns, is now a high-end arts-loft district. Even Skid Row's developing. Classic South L.A. neighborhoods have evolved because there's been so much invested and so much developed."

Ayer's key collaborators on the film — as far as the look was concerned — included cinematographer Roman Vasyanov (*Suicide Squad*, *Fury*/2014, and *End of Watch*/2012) and production designer Andrew Menzies (*Fury*). "We crashed fantasy with the real world," Menzies says. "We enhanced what L.A. has to offer with all its different cultures. We used all those, and then we had the elves and the orcs and mingled them together." It was important to show the cultural effects that the supernatural creatures had on the city. "We tried to work out, what is the orc-ish impres-







Will Smith as  
L.A. cop Daryl Ward



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David Ayer directs Joel Edgerton in *Bright*

sion that's imprinted on L.A.?" Menzies says. "We developed a language for the movie that's a real language for orcs with an alphabet, and then added that orc layer with advertising posters and writing so that you really feel like they have been integrated into this world for centuries. Our signs actually say something in orc-ish. If someone wanted to translate it, they could." He adds: "We added a lot of litter to our sets because we want to feel like this society of *Bright* is on the brink of breaking. Everything's a little worn, a little tired. The police cars are beat up. There's a lot of conflict among the species, and everything is just frayed around the edges."

"The first day driving through the orc neighborhood — it's modern-day Los Angeles," Smith says. "We're cops, and we roll up on this outdoor orc barbecue, and there's, like, an entire cow on a spit in the middle of a junkyard. It's just this beautiful blend and collision of these fantastic worlds."

Eric Newman, who produced alongside Ayer and Bryan Unkeless, adds: "We were able to hit a couple of key locations that give our world scale

**David Ayer**  
*"I like to bring authenticity to the screen, and part of that comes from having the actors understand what they're doing"*

and detail, and hopefully, make the audience think, Wow, down that alleyway there's a whole other world!"

And Ayer went beyond locations to ensure authenticity, insisting that the cast underwent extensive preparations before the start of principal photography. All the actors who played cops in the film were required to work alongside real LAPD officers.

"I like to bring authenticity to the screen, and part of that comes from having the actors understand what they're doing," Ayer says. "We had some fantastic technical advisors take them through a lot of tactical drills — including shooting, so they know how to use a gun and move like LAPD police officers. It really helped them get that insight into what it means to be a cop these days."

The cast also underwent extensive physical training at RMMA (Richard Mesquita Martial Arts) in the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles — not only to learn to be fit, but also to bond as teammates. "Once you kick someone



in their face, then you can trust them!” Smith says. “What a fun way to build camaraderie.” Ayer also brought Michael Haro into the project, a Los Angeles locations expert with whom he had worked on the Denzel Washington movie *Training Day* in 2001. “I’ve worked a lot in South Central L.A. over the years,” says Haro, whose other L.A.-based credits include *Entourage* (2004-11), *Southland* (2009-13) and *Aquarius* (2015-16). “That gave me some feeling of comfort coming into this project. But there’s no question it has changed significantly since *Training Day*. The city used to be like a backlot for us, but its growth means areas that were previously vacant now have high population density.”

The challenge this presents, according to Haro, is not just finding the best locations, but shooting in such a way that it doesn’t upset or inconvenience residents: “*Bright* involved a lot of heavy-duty explosives and gunfire, and also some night shooting, so there was potential for disruption. Fortunately, none of the neighborhoods we selected refused to let us shoot — people were surprisingly amenable, given what we wanted to do.”

The complexity of the shoot didn’t end there. “Planning shoots in urban areas is very time consuming and logistically complex,” Haro says. “There was one major sequence in an area of the city called Rampart. It took us seven or eight weeks of preparation to set up a 10-night shoot. In these dense neighborhoods, you have to think about where you’re going to park residents’ cars and whether you need to put them up in hotels. You have to be able to hide your equipment from view but make sure it’s still close enough to be accessible.”

Some of the night shoots took the production to parts of Los Angeles rarely seen on film, and included detailed action sequences that, in some cases, involved fight scenes and shoot-outs, and in others, huge explosions and towering walls of flame. In the case of one of the film’s final scenes, the crew had to cleverly stage a massive fire, filming the sequence partially on location and partially on a soundstage.

“Since the majority of the exterior was a practical location, obviously we couldn’t really burn it,” says executive producer Adam Merims (*Straight Outta Compton*/2015, *Baby Driver*/2017). “It was really complicated because that particular location is right next to the 101 Freeway, and we had to figure out how to keep flames and smoke and fire from flying up above the freeway. Then, to match, we had to build an interior set that we could set fully on fire.”

The matching basement set and exterior corridor was built at Disney’s Golden Oak Ranch in Newhall, California — and as soon as construction was completed, the sets were burned to the ground. “We set it on fire one night and had Will and Joel come through that set as well as some stunt people,” Merims says. “Will is so experienced with action that he very rarely will refuse to do something. You have to actually tell him, ‘No, we’re not going to let you do that’. And Joel’s



Noomi Rapace as elf Leilah

**Michael Haro**  
*“I like taking productions into poorer areas because it shows the kids in the neighborhood that there’s something out there they can also be part of”*

Australian, so he’s always willing to take a shot.” The production used Los Angeles Center Studios as a base, but was mostly filmed around locations including MacArthur Park, L.A.’s famous Arts District and Echo Park, which hosted a noisy night-time chase scene. “We were mainly out on location,” Haro says. “David used very little green screen, because he wanted to make sure the fantasy element didn’t affect the film’s realism. One of the key points was not to make too much

of the fantasy elements, but to treat these characters like different ethnic groups.”

One tough scene that might have been shot in a studio but was actually shot on location for the purposes of authenticity, was a SWAT meeting scene involving lead actors Smith and Edgerton. “We shot this at the Department of Water and Power [DWP] facility downtown,” Haro says. “The folks at DWP were super in accommodating all of our requests, but it was a challenging location because it’s still a working facility. And, in addition to working around the DWP’s schedule, we had to utilize other areas that had environmental challenges for us to overcome so as to work in safety. For example, the building had lead paint that was disintegrating into dust on the walls and ground.”

In terms of construction work, Haro says one L.A. house was remodeled internally, while six weeks were spent building a mini-mart and gas station — just so it could be blown up. This, Haro says, was located at the intersection of Santa Fe Street and Mateo Street in the Arts District. “We also took over a couple of houses that had recently been renovated for Airbnb for use as the actors’ green rooms,” he adds. “Overall, people were amenable to most of the requests we made, which is kudos to my location assistants.” South Central L.A. has a history of being a tough area, as depicted in films including *Training Day*, *Colors* (1988) and *Boyz n the Hood* (1991). This means that safety precautions need to be taken when planning to take large productions into the area. “I’ve been around this area since I was a boy,





Top: Edgar Ramirez as elf Kandomere, leader of the Magic Task Force, and Happy Anderson as L.A. cop MonteHugh.  
Lucy Fry as elf Tikka

so I know what to expect,” Haro says. “You have to be vigilant when scouting and also think about the levels of security and policing you’ll need during the shoot. Personally, I like taking productions into poorer areas because it shows the kids in the neighborhood that there’s something out there they can also be part of.” Supervising stunt co-ordinator Robert Alonzo (*Deadpool*/2016) worked with Ayer to develop a style of movement for supernatural creatures, eventually creating a grid that designated how they moved within the *Bright* universe. “We established a distinct movement pattern specific to each species,” Alonzo says. “Elves basically have the superhero-esque type of movement with agility, power, and strength — they’re light, quick, and fast. Orcs, on the other hand, they are still fast, but not as fast as humans and definitely not as fast as our elves. They’re

more dense, heavier, but still also maintain the strength.

“Although this is a fantastical world, the physics still are much relatable to what we have in our own world. That’s what gives it the gritty, realistic, more believable feeling. It’s something that we as humans can still understand as opposed to superhero movies where there’s quite a lot of CGI effects and quite a lot of flying. This stays more grounded in that respect.” Prep work for *Bright* started in June 2016. The actual shoot took place between October 2016 and February 2017, with a few pickups in the summer of 2017. “It was a tough shoot, seven days-a-week, with a lot of 15- to 18-hour days,” Haro says. “But it was exciting. A lot of this job can be office-based, so it’s good to be out there scouting and facing logistics challenges.” The production’s location selection, permitting and management was aided by the team at FilmL.A., the city’s film office. FilmL.A. president

**Paul Audley**  
“The Thanksgiving holiday was coming up, so the producers gave out 300 free turkey gift vouchers, which was a nice touch”

Paul Audley says: “It’s great to have productions like *Bright* in the city because it shows what’s actually possible here. Sometimes producers aren’t aware of what we can accommodate but, with the right amount of planning, we can get all of L.A.’s major agencies and departments on board and achieve most things. For example, a few years back, we had a train locomotive rolling down an L.A. street smashing into cars for Christopher Nolan’s *Inception* (2010).”

Like Haro, Audley says a key challenge is negotiating the changes that inevitably take place in a thriving city like Los Angeles: “We need to be sensitive to the fact that the Arts District has already experienced a lot of disruption as it has gone from being warehouses rented by artists to apartment complexes. Residents have seen a lot of influx of traffic as new businesses and restaurants have come into the area, so it’s important to get out in advance and ensure people know what’s coming.”

In the case of *Bright*, Audley says that the production team showed great diplomacy in getting residents on board: “In one area, the Thanksgiving holiday was coming up, so the producers gave out 300 free turkey gift vouchers, which was a nice touch.”

Audley says the search is constantly on for new areas of the city that can be used for filming. “Rampart hadn’t really been used much before, but it gave the production options that had the feel of L.A. Downtown from years ago. And fortunately, that was an area where they got a great reception from locals.”

Recognition for Haro’s efforts came when his team was named Location Team of the Year at the 2017 COLA Awards, organized by Film Liaisons in California Statewide (FLICS). And at time of writing, there were strong rumors that Netflix is preparing to greenlight a sequel to *Bright*. So it’s possible that orcs and elves will soon be back on the streets of downtown L.A. ●





HBO's epic sci-fi series *Westworld*, which came back to the Santa Clarita area for a second season

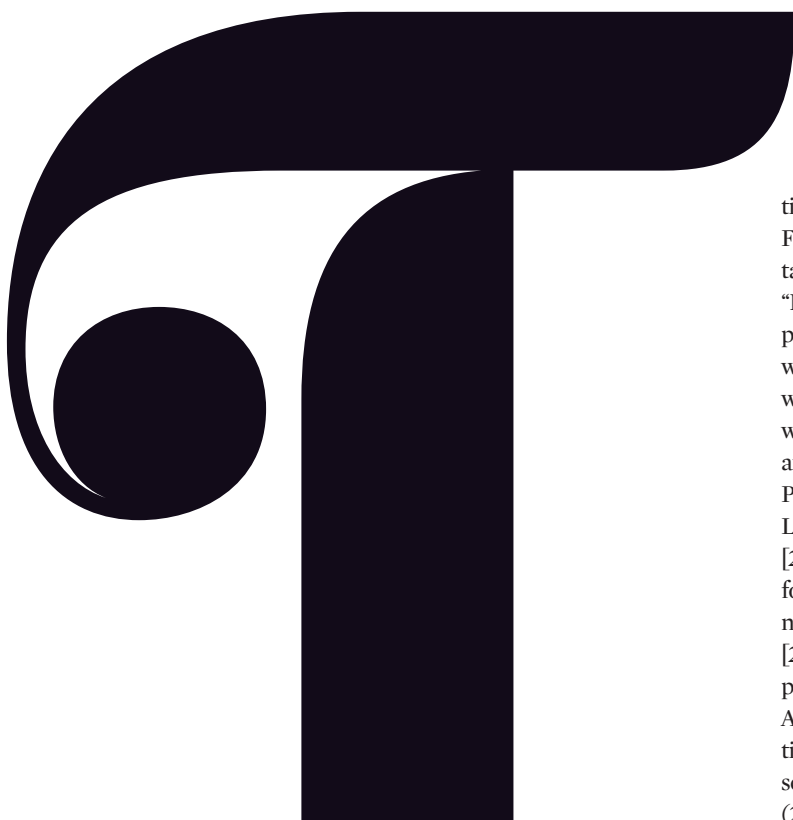
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# THE SECOND GOLD RUSH

Now in its third year, California's expanded Film & Television Tax Credit Program 2.0 has succeeded beyond all expectations. TV series that had emigrated from California in search of a better deal have returned, and new films and movies are queuing up to shoot in the Golden State. Andy Fry reports

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**THE RELAUNCH** of California's tax credit program in 2015/2016 has transformed the fortunes of the Golden State, according to California Film Commission executive director Amy Lemisch. "In year two of the new program [2016-2017], which has been dubbed Program 2.0, California awarded \$339M in tax credits to 64 projects. All told, we estimate the year-two tax credits yielded \$2.4BN of in-state spending. When you combine that with the first year of Program 2.0, it means our incentive has attracted or retained more than 100 film and TV projects, and generated \$3.7BN in spending."

Now in its third year, Lemisch says Program 2.0 continues to deliver a huge boost to California's studios and crews, as well as the ancillary businesses that support the industry. "We've undoubtedly seen significant increases in employment," she adds. "We're hearing from all the soundstage facilities about how busy they are. I hear it from crew people all the time. So we're definitely seeing the results of an increase in production, which was exactly what the new program was intended to achieve."

One of the most notable successes of the expanded tax credit program has been the number of high-end TV series that have shifted to California from other parts of the US and Canada. At press time, no fewer than 12 TV series had relocated, including HBO's *Ballers* (2015-) from Miami, Showtime's *The Affair* (2014-) from New York and Fox's *Scream Queens* (2015-) from Louisiana. Of these 12, four series have moved from California's arch-rival Vancouver, including Sony Pictures Television's (SPT) *Timeless* (2016-), renewed for season two by NBC. That show alone employed 250 cast, 220 crew and 3,000 extras.

*Timeless* was awarded \$9.9M in tax credits, but it is not only the money that is bringing TV productions back in such large numbers. Commenting of the decision to switch the show to California, Ed Lammi, executive vice-president of production for SPT, says: "Thanks to the tax credit program, we are able to capitalize on California's vast talent pool of experienced crew and below-the-line support and infrastructure. We know these will be a huge benefit for the second season of *Timeless*."

Lammi's point is echoed by Eric Fierstein, location manager on HBO's *Ballers* and Showtime's relaunch of *Twin Peaks* (2017-). "Everyone understands why producers need to go in search of incentives," he says. "But

what you get in California are the best crews in the world and the most comprehensive support systems and suppliers. Everything is a phone call away, which means the creative team doesn't lose any time on the shoot."

Fierstein believes California's unparalleled infrastructure is more important than ever now that TV series have become so creatively-driven: "Networks are more willing these days to give the creative talent the support they need, so the emphasis is not so much on budget restraints as on what it will take to make a show distinctive. Take a project like *Twin Peaks*, which was one of the most wonderful and invigorating projects I've ever worked on. David Lynch's ambitious vision needed the kind of flexibility and expertise you only find in California."

Part of the appeal of hosting TV series, California Film Commission's Lemisch adds, is that most are set up to be returning franchises. "*Veep* [2012-] and *American Horror Story*, [2011-] which have relocated to California, are both long-running series, meaning guaranteed work for a number of years. NBC's *This Is Us* [2016-] and TNT's *Animal Kingdom* [2016-], which both started in California with support from the tax credit program, have commitments until at least season three."

As recently as December 2017, the California Film Commission conditionally approved incentives for a further three TV pilots and four new series. Among these is Ridley Scott's new series for CBS, *Strange Angel* (2018-), which reinforces Fierstein's point about the ambition of the projects now setting up in California. Based on George Pendle's book, *Strange Angel* explores the life of Jack Parson in 1940s Los Angeles. Parsons helped pioneer the field of American rocketry, while living a double life as a disciple of occultist Aleister Crowley and a performer of sex magick rituals.

Movies are also returning to California. One of the shrewdest things about Program 2.0, Lemisch argues, is that there are four funding buckets, each targeted at different kinds of production. At the same time, restrictions on films have been removed, so that projects of any budget may apply for tax credits. As a result, California was able to snare Disney's fantasy feature film *A Wrinkle in Time* in 2016/17. This has now been followed up by a remake of *A Star is Born* (2018), starring Bradley Cooper and Lady Gaga, the latest movie in Paramount's *Transformers* franchise — *Bumblebee* (2018) — and *Captain Marvel* (2019), directed by Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck.

#### AMY LEMISCH

"Our incentive has attracted or retained more than 100 film and TV projects, and generated \$3.7BN in spending"

Also of note, Lemisch says, is the news that Disney's latest Marvel movie, *Captain Marvel* (2019), is set to shoot in the state. Since 2014, virtually all Marvel movies have been based in Georgia, which makes this something of a coup for California. "Our headquarters and post-production facilities are in California, so it's very exciting to be able to film *Captain Marvel* here in our home state," said Marvel Studios co-president Louis D'Esposito at the time of the announcement.

There was further good news just before the end of 2017 when it was revealed that Quentin Tarantino's new movie *Untitled #9* (2018), budg- ▲



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eted at \$100M, is also lined up to shoot in California. Based around the activities of cult leader and serial killer Charles Manson, there are reports that Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt and Leonardo DiCaprio are all in the frame to star in the film. Other upcoming movies to have been awarded tax credits include a new adaptation of Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* (2019) and L.A.-based crime thriller *Destroyer* (2018), starring Nicole Kidman.

But it is not just the \$100M-plus movies that are coming back to California, says location manager Dan Cooley, whose credits include TV series *Sons Of Anarchy* (2008-14) and movie *Saint Judy* (2017): "For me, one of the most positive things about the incentive program is that it's reinvigorating the indie film sector. I love working with independent features and it's noticeable that a lot more producers are now taking the time to put together applications, because they have a real chance of getting them. That's great news for the California talent base, but also for the wider film industry, because independent films are now featuring so prominently at events like the Oscars."

A case in point is indie movie *Last Days in the Desert* (2016), which saw Ewan McGregor portraying Jesus' 40 days and nights in the wilderness. Filmed in California's Anza-Borrego, the biblical tale received a \$700,000 credit. In an interview with the Los Angeles Times, producer Bonnie Curtis said: "If we didn't have a tax credit on this movie, I'm almost certain we would have walked away."

The impact of the incentive program has been felt across the state. FilmL.A. reports that on-location feature production rose 7.6% to 1,172 shooting days in the third quarter of 2017, while TV drama rose 4.1% to 1,231 shooting days in the same period. L.A. is also leading the way in TV-pilot production, according to a FilmL.A. report released in August 2017. Of the 173 US pilots made during 2016-17, 68 were filmed in L.A., yielding \$303M in production spending. "With so many projects under way, California is home to more scripted series than its top five competitors combined," says FilmL.A. president Paul Audley.

By FilmL.A.'s count, 173 series are currently in production in California, out of the 426 series sampled across the network, cable and digital distribution channels. That includes 62 L.A.-based drama series, 30 of which receive the state's tax credit. The significance of these numbers is not lost on L.A. mayor Eric Garcetti, who says: "If you grew up in Detroit, someone on your block worked for a car manufacturer or owned a business where autoworkers spent their pay checks. Here in L.A., the same goes for our entertainment industry — it's the bedrock of our middle class."

It is not just location work that is booming in L.A. In June 2017, the Los Angeles Times published a report in which it said that occupancy levels at some studios were reaching "new highs", with companies including Netflix, Amazon and BuzzFeed all contributing to the demand.

Soundstages that have historically run at an occupancy rate of 70% are now nearing capacity — an example being Los Angeles Center Studios. As a result, several leading companies are expanding their operations, including Paramount, which recently received city approval for a \$700M expansion to its historic Melrose Avenue lot. There is also a new player in L.A.'s studio sector. In May 2017, Vista Studios opened for business in Playa Vista, an L.A. neighborhood often referred to as 'Silicon Beach' because of the number of high-tech firms based in the vicinity. The 30,000 sq ft, 4K-capable facility offers four soundstages — the largest is 6,300 sq ft — equipment rental, editing capabilities and 24/7 broadcast operations. The turnkey facility was launched because "there is a pent-up need", according to Vista Studios CEO and co-founder Randall Heer.

The positive impact of the tax credit program is also being felt in Long Beach, 20 km outside of downtown L.A., making it inside the city's Thirty Mile Zone (TMZ). "We've always been busy with TV production," says Tasha Day, special events and filming coordinator for the city of Long Beach. "But there has definitely been an increase in light of the new

incentive. We're now authorizing 500 permits a year and have seen an influx of feature films to the Long Beach area."

TV projects to have filmed in Long Beach include *Criminal Minds* (2005), *The Fosters* (2013-) and *Animal Kingdom*, while high-profile feature film visitors have included multiple Oscar winner *La La Land* (2016) and the latest instalment of Paramount's *Transformers* movie franchise.

Another popular filming location in the vicinity of L.A. is Orange County (OC), which boasts 42 miles of coastline and eight cities within the TMZ. OC film commissioner Janice Arrington says: "Being adjacent to L.A. County means we always have a good volume of work, but there's no question that the expanded incentive program has been good news for OC."

According to Arrington, producers are attracted to OC's beautiful stretch of coastline, which includes Laguna Beach, Huntington Beach, Newport Beach, and San Clemente. "But in addition, we have architecture that ranges from late 1800s to contemporary. In fact, we're also very good for futuristic/sci-fi productions — we hosted the recent *Star Trek* movies, as well as *Tomorrowland* (2015)."

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#### ERIC GARCETTI

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"If you grew up in Detroit, someone on your block worked for a car manufacturer... Here in L.A., the same goes for our entertainment industry — it's the bedrock of our middle class"

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Productions benefiting from the tax credit to have been based in OC include the George Clooney-directed movie *Suburbicon* (2017), TV series *Rosewood* (2015-17) and *American Horror Story*, which relocated to California from Louisiana. Scenes for the new *American Horror Story: Cult* were shot in both Santa Ana and Old Towne Orange, a one-square-mile zone that was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1997. Michelle Rodriguez, film, arts and entertainment manager for Greater Palm Springs (GPS), is another who is upbeat about the impact of the state incentive: "We've been Hollywood's backlot for more than a century and we 'get' production. But when we exhibited at AFM this year, one of the most common comments we heard was how happy people were to find incentives in their own backyard. They are happy to no longer have to travel to Canada or Eastern Europe to benefit from incentive programs."

Major productions to have visited GPS recently include *A Star is Born*, *Just Getting Started* (2017), and *Senior Moment* (2018-). "This area excels, both because of its unique looks and for doubling," Rodriguez adds. "When people want iconic desert or mid-century architecture, our area is perfect. We have also stood in for Arizona, New Mexico and the Middle East. And GPS is a chameleon when it comes to period pieces. We have a wealth of period architecture and western backdrops."

One big piece of news is GPS' recent decision to introduce its own local incentive program. Available to a wide range of productions, the



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ABC Family's *Switched at Birth* — set in Kansas, shot in California

\$100,000-a-year fund is designed to encourage production in the Coachella Valley. Rodriguez says that many of the inquiries into the new incentive are from producers interested in pairing the GPS credit with the California state and Riverside County programs. “That has helped push the needle in terms of bringing productions to Greater Palm Springs,” she adds.

Santa Clarita, one of the busiest production hubs within the TMZ, is also experiencing a boom. According to Evan Thomason, economic development associate of the Santa Clarita Film Office, “the incentives have brought a production renaissance in California”. He adds: “In Santa Clarita, studios and ranches are busy and every business surrounding the film and TV industry is benefiting. All of this is creating real optimism.”

Projects to have filmed in and around Santa Clarita over the last year include *Mayans MC* (2018), a pilot for a *Sons of Anarchy* spin-off from Kurt Sutter. Based at Santa Clarita Studios, the show also filmed at Rancho Deluxe and the Blue Cloud Movie Ranch, as well as in homes and streets around the area. Santa Clarita Studios also hosted *Shooter* (2016-), a USA Network series based on the 2007 Mark Wahlberg film. This series also used Blue Cloud Movie Ranch, along with the Hyatt Regency Valencia, the College of the Canyons, Salt Creek Grille, the Placerita Water & Power Plant, Elks Lodge and Westfield Valencia Town Center.

Echoing the point made by the California Film Commission's Lemisch, Thomason says a big part of the incentive's success is that it is encouraging series to put down roots in California. A high-profile illustration of this is HBO's epic sci-fi series *Westworld*, (2016-), which has just been back in the Santa Clarita area for a second season. Based at the Melody Ranch Motion Picture Studio, the award-winning series also filmed at Sable Ranch, Veluzat Motion Picture Ranch and Blue Cloud Movie Ranch.

“The incentives may attract shows back to California, but it's the studios, ranches, crews and network of film-commission offices that persuade them to stay,” Thomason adds. “In Santa Clarita, for example, we have our own tailored incentive program to top up the state tax credit. Since 2009, we have refunded more than \$460,000 to 115 productions and companies, and saved productions more than \$240,000 on the sheriff fees associated with filming.”

The increased volume of work is encouraging Santa Clarita companies to make longer term investments, Thomason adds. For example, Valencia Studios, home to long-running CBS series *NCIS* (2003-), is reported to be building an additional facility called Crimson Studios, a half-hour drive away in Chatsworth. Similarly, the incentive has encouraged the

popular Santa Clarita Studios (SCS) to embark on an expansion plan, according to vice-president Richard Deutsch.

Last year, SCS began the process of adding green-screen/motion-capture studio capabilities. This year, Deutsch says, the emphasis is on expanding the infrastructure that supports the studio's 16 soundstages: “In fall, we broke ground on a multi-million-dollar development that will give us extra production offices, and now we are also doubling our parking. All of that is being handled by a local construction contractor.”

Deutsch agrees with California Film Commission's Lemisch that the incentive has increased the number of scripted-TV shows coming into the state, and brought feature films back to California. “We had a great time servicing Disney's *A Wrinkle in Time*,” he adds.

“That was a huge undertaking, involving 350

employees. And we are soon to embark on another movie project [as yet undisclosed], which I think we were able to secure because of the success of *Wrinkle*.”

In TV terms, SCS is constantly busy with shows, including Hulu's *Shut Eye* (2016-) and CBS hit *S.W.A.T.* (2017-) “*S.W.A.T.* recently saw its first season order extended by seven episodes, which is an encouraging sign,” Deutsch says. “It's always great news for studios when series become long-running, returnable franchises.”

There is no question in Deutsch's mind that SCS has seen greater soundstage utilization as a result of Program 2.0. “In fact, we're so busy it forces us to be creative about the way we manage the volume of production coming into Santa Clarita,” he says. “We're traveling all over the surrounding area looking for warehouses and buildings that can be leased and fitted out as temporary soundstages”. One show that used this approach was ABC Family's *Switched at Birth* (2011-17) — which was set in Kansas, providing yet another example of California's ability to double.

Deutsch's upbeat assessment is echoed by Monica Harrison, who opened Santa Clarita-based location services company L.A. Film Locations in 2003. She says: “We manage every step of the process, from initial links to director scouts, and the management of shoots from beginning to end. We also follow up after a shoot is completed. Location managers call us daily, so we are always looking for new locations to add to our database. In 2017, we added large office buildings, a motorsports facility, 100,000 sq ft-plus of industrial facilities, and various bars, restaurants, mansions, and more.”

According to Harrison, filming has been non-stop since the new incentive began. Two recent projects with which L.A. Film Locations has been involved are Fox's *Lucifer* (2015-) and HBO's *Sharp Objects* (2018-), both of which were recipients of tax credits. As a result, she adds, the Santa Clarita community as a whole has enjoyed the benefits: “The ripple effect is huge. Local businesses all benefit — restaurants, dry cleaners, thrift shops, lumber yards, auto-body shops, car dealers, and home-improvement stores. Hotels have higher occupancy rates, and crew and cast members join gyms and yoga studios, etc.”

Dylan Lewis, owner of Santa Clarita-based Blue Cloud Movie Ranch, says that the security provided by Program 2.0 has enabled him to make improvement on his property, notably the expansion of his Middle Eastern village, the introduction of Latin-themed buildings, and new access roads and parking facilities. “But it's not just the incentive that is creating the positive mood in California,” Lewis adds. “We're also seeing ▲



increased activity from cable, Netflix, Amazon and other emerging platforms. One of the most notable benefits is that scripted production has become a year-round business. You don't see the seasonal breaks that used to characterize the TV business in California."

Santa Clarita's proximity to downtown L.A. has made it a clear beneficiary of the tax credit program. But other local film commissions around the state have reported increased enquiries, according to the California Film Commission's Lemisch. "Our data shows that, when productions film on location outside L.A., they typically spend \$50,000-\$100,000 in the area. So one of our goals is to encourage more jobs and spending to regions statewide, and we are beginning to see that happen as the program matures."

In Southern California, San Diego is aiming to re-establish its film credentials. In 2015, pro-production mayor Kevin Faulconer hired a new filming program manager, Brandy Shimabukuro, who has been building an online directory of San Diego County filming locations and production crews, and overseeing efforts to streamline the city's permitting process. Partially as a result, San Diego has hosted TV series *Pitch* (2016-17) and *Animal Kingdom* (2016-), which between them generated around \$3.6M in local spend. Other TV shows to have chosen San Diego include *Total Divas* (2013-), *The Last Ship* (2014-), *Total Bellas* (2016-) and *Ingobernable* (2017-). The big ambition, going forward, Shimabukuro says, is to secure Paramount's sequel to *Top Gun*, the iconic 1986 movie filmed on location in San Diego with Tom Cruise in the lead role.

A key part of Program 2.0 is that it offers an additional 5% tax credit for filming days outside L.A.'s TMZ, points out Karen Nordstrand of the Monterey Film Commission, whose area played host to HBO's acclaimed *Big Little Lies* (2017-). "As a result, we have been included in more location searches for incentive-approved features looking for locations outside the zone," she adds.

In the new incentives environment, the most significant developments outside the TMZ have come from San Francisco and the Bay Area. Susanah Robbins, executive director of the San Francisco Film Commission, says the city has been hosting portions of incentive-backed productions, while the Bay Area has had two full seasons of *13 Reasons Why* (2017-), as well as *Bumblebee* (2018) and the upcoming *Midway*. "Since San Francisco is part of the Bay Area, and the workforce comes from all over the Bay Area, I think everyone is feeling really positive about the impact of the incentive and the amount of work coming to the area," Robbins adds.

Incentive-backed productions to have visited San Francisco include *Beautiful Boy* (2018), a movie starring Steve Carrell, Timothée Chalamet and Maura Tierney, which shot for 12 days in the city. San Francisco also had visits from HBO's *Ballers* and the blockbuster *Ant-Man and the Wasp* (2018), starring Michael Douglas and Paul Rudd — the latter not a recipient of tax incentives. "Ant-Man shot for five days of second-unit shooting in September and then returned for 10 days of first-unit shooting at the end of the year," Robbins says.

Overall, Robbins reports "a good mix" of studio features, indie films and streaming shows: "Coming up, we have a Taiwanese TV series for Netflix shooting for one month and a portion of another blockbuster that will shoot for eight days. We also have a large indie film shooting for 26 days in March and April, and are waiting to hear if a film for Netflix will be greenlit for filming at the end of April through June. In addition, we'll have a few days of the Showtime show *Billions* (2016-), as well as season two of Netflix' *The OA* (2016-). And this is all in addition to the still-photo and commercial work that remains our bread and butter."

Robbins says one of the big draws of San Francisco is that it has its own incentive, which can be used on top of the state tax credit. "Via our Scene in San Francisco Rebate Program, we rebate up to \$600,000 per film or television season," she says. To qualify, productions with a budget under

\$3M need to shoot 55% of their days in San Francisco. If the budget is more than \$3M, they need to shoot 65% of their days in the city.

Location managers are upbeat about San Francisco as a filming location. Eric Fierstein, who worked on season three of *Ballers*, says: "We called in local expert Dan Kemp to help us with the San Francisco and Oakland legs of the shoot. Dan helped us achieve a scene at San Francisco's Fairmont Hotel involving hundreds of extras acting as the Raider Nation [the official fan base of NFL team Oakland Raiders]. The hotel was brilliant, allowing us to shoot some scenes inside. It was an example of California at its best."

Dan Cooley, location manager on *Ant-Man and the Wasp*, is equally upbeat: "We spent six months around San Francisco and it was a great experience. There's always been a kind of mythology that it's hard to shoot in San Francisco because of the parking and the cost. But it really isn't as bad as people make out. The film office was really supportive and the SF Police Department had a real 'get it done' attitude."

As Robbins observes, the Bay Area is also benefiting. Just to the north of San Francisco, for example, beautiful Marin County recently received a boost when Netflix decided to renew its acclaimed scripted series *13 Reasons Why*. In the first series, based on a best-selling book by Jay Asher, the central character is a teenager who is struggling to understand why his classmate and crush Hannah decided to end her own life. Season two, which shot in multiple locations during 2017, picks up in the aftermath of Hannah's death and explores various characters' journeys toward recovery.

Marin County film liaison Deborah Albre says: "It's been great for our

#### DEBORAH ALBRE

"Not only has *13 Reasons Why* attracted production spend, but it's been so popular on social media that it's given Marin County a stronger tourism profile"

community to see *13 Reasons Why* return for season two. Not only has the show attracted production spend, but it's been so popular on social media that it's given the county a stronger tourism profile. We also got a piece of the new *Transformers* movie in 2017. We haven't been this busy in the last 10 years."

Albre points to a recent California Film Commission report that examines the impact of shows on local communities across California. According to the report, season one of *13 Reasons Why* generated almost \$8M in local spend for Marin and a further \$10M for nearby Solano County. "Marin offers a lot to producers," Albre adds. "We've got some great mountain views and forests, and we're conveniently close to San Francisco. Our capital, San Rafael, is perfect as 'any town' America and is also film-friendly. In the second season of *13 Reasons Why*, it hosted one scene involving 900 extras."

Solano County is another Bay Area location that is being transformed by the surge in film and TV production. Like Marin, it has attractive loca-



tions, but it is also benefitting from the recent launch of a filming complex on Mare Island, on the site of a former naval base.

Mark Walter, who has overseen the complex's development on behalf of equipment rental firm Cinelease, says Film Mare Island is perfectly suited for big-budget production. "It's conveniently located within the Bay Area and has around one million sq ft of buildings available for filming," he says "It also has all the space you need for the support services, like parking, offices, etc, as well as a network of private roads. This means we don't need to think about permits or annoying the neighbors."

Walter, general manager of Film Mare Island, says the first priority was to repurpose the complex's vast, warehouse-style buildings for use by producers. One of the most exciting attributes of the site, he adds, is the eclectic array of structures left behind by the navy: "This used to be a fully functioning community with all manner of residential and commercial buildings, including auditoriums, industrial buildings, period residences, a chapel, tree-lined streets, parks, and waterfront areas. So there's scope to use it as a studio and a location."

In terms of credits, Film Mare Island has welcomed *13 Reasons Why* and *Bumblebee*, which received a \$22M tax credit for shooting in the state. "*Bumblebee* came here for a week in September and made really good use of the complex," Walter says. "There were helicopters, special effects, pyrotechnics, and night shoots, all of which showcased Mare Island's potential for feature films. There's nowhere else in the Bay Area where you could do all that."

There is no question that Film Mare Island got the thumbs up from the *Bumblebee* production team. Location manager Jonathan 'JJ' Hook said its dry docks were so good that "the ending of the movie was re-written after finding the location".

According to Walter, Film Mare Island is about to move forward with an exciting new phase of development: "On December 19, we got approval to start building new soundstages," he says. "Our aim now is to have those complete by Spring 2019, because we have a high-profile client that wants to move in there as an anchor tenant."

The new complex will cover 56 acres and include five sound stages, as well as a range of production-support buildings. There will also be an educational component in the form of a media campus. "I've worked on studio projects across the US and I know the kind of impact this will have on the Bay Area," Walter adds. "It will provide producers with a long-term base and give crew and vendors the confidence to set up residence in the Bay Area."

While Film Mare Island's business plan is not dependent on Program 2.0, Walter says there's no question it is a key consideration when undertaking a project of this scale. "Any kind of long-term support gives everyone in the industry confidence," he says. "For us, it would be great news if the state decides to extend the program beyond 2019/2020."

Mare Island abuts the town of Vallejo, which is also starting to see an influx of production work. Like Mare Island, it featured prominently in the new *Bumblebee* project. Set in 1987, *Bumblebee* is about a Transformer on the run, which finds refuge in a junkyard in a small Californian beach town. Of Vallejo, Hook says: "it has great bones. It has an Anywhere America, *Back to the Future*-type vibe. The great thing about Vallejo is there aren't these huge chain stores. The city hasn't been turned into a strip mall."



*13 Reasons Why*, shot in the Bay Area for two seasons

The impact of the state incentive has been felt all the way up on the northern border of California, according to Cassandra Hesseltine, film commissioner for Humboldt-Del Norte County: "This isn't the kind of area that gets an entire production, but the dramatic nature of our scenery means we're always in with a chance of getting part of a California-based project. That's how the increased state incentive has benefited us."

In 2016, Disney's *A Wrinkle in Time* paid a visit to Humboldt-Del Norte to take advantage of the area's spectacular redwoods. "And this year, we have had a Netflix feature filming here," Hesseltine adds. "That's two major projects in 10 months, whereas we used to be looking at one substantial project every five years."

Hesseltine, who serves as president of film commissioner industry body FLICS (the Film Liaisons In California Statewide) since 2016, makes another observation about the impact of Program 2.0: "Odd though it might seem, the program seems to be encouraging productions to locate here even if they don't benefit directly from an incentive."

There are a couple of reasons why this might be the case. The first, Hesseltine suggests, is that non-incentive productions still get to benefit from the investments made on the back of incentive productions, including studios and ranches. The second is to do with quality of life. "Instead of working out of hotels for months, people can see their families at the end of each day," Hesseltine says. "With the number and range of incentive programs shrinking across North America, it's possible that non-incentive productions are now seeing the benefits and efficiencies that come with working closer to home and are also following suit."

Netflix chief content officer Ted Sarandos makes a similar point when discussing his company's expansion in California. "When you think about productions chasing tax credits all over the world, it puts the onus on the cast and crew, who have to travel," he says. "I hope you save enough money to put a \$100M production at risk by having a lot of miserable people around."

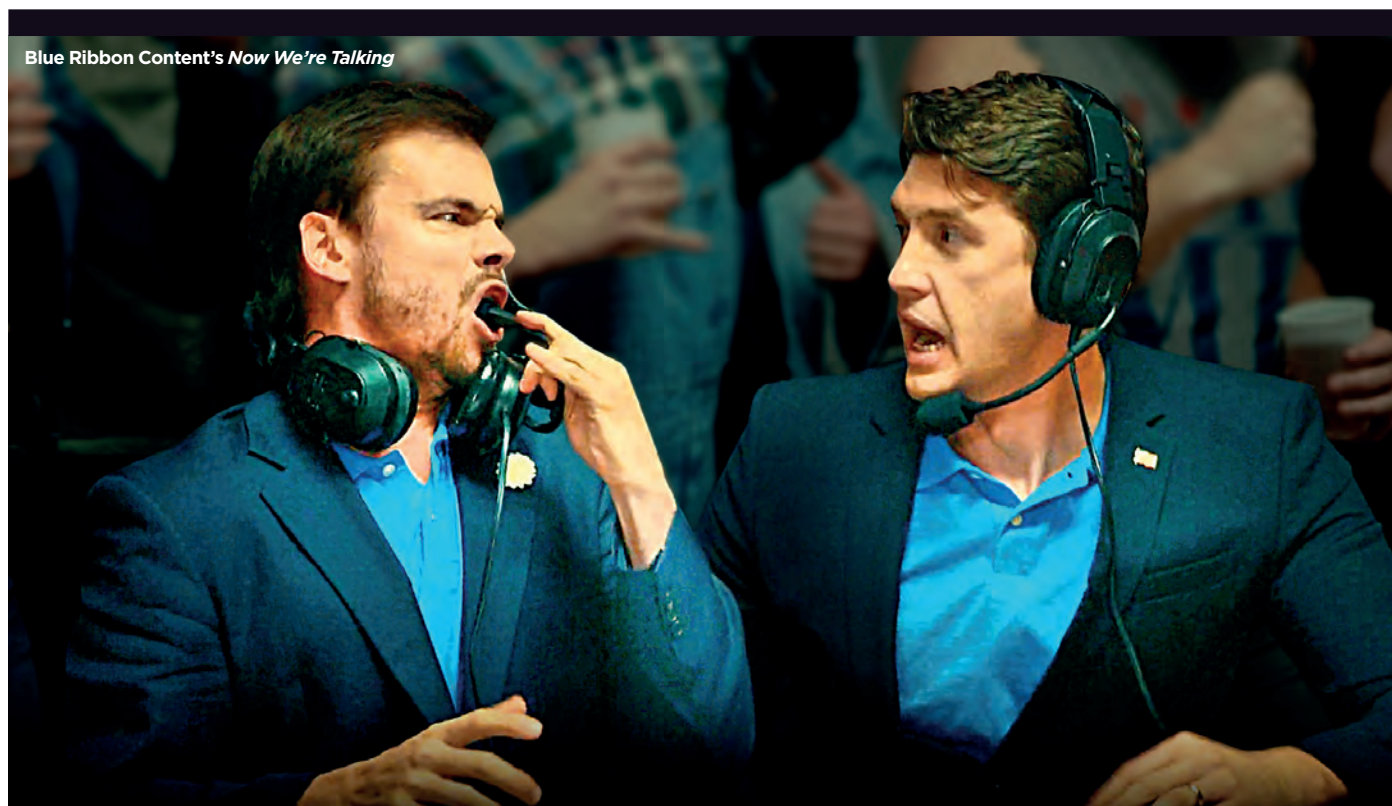
Orange County's Janice Arrington makes a related point about the possible financial benefits of shooting in California. "Having your shoot close to the studio HQ means better oversight, because studio executives and specialist production personnel can come down and visit any time they want. In an era when shows can cost \$100M or more, that means it's possible to keep a closer eye on the huge investment you're making." ●



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# SHORTS ARE MAKING IT BIG

For the new generation of video makers, short is sweet. And so are speed, ease and economy. And while California's growing community of short-form producers may lack the time and budgets enjoyed by their long-form counterparts, they still want great locations. Juliana Koranteng reports







A NEW wave in filmmaking is emerging as California's production professionals increasingly add digital-first short-form content to their portfolios.

In recent years, there has been a boom in three- to 10-minute-long formats, both scripted and unscripted, including high-end and low-budget films, episodic series, music videos and branded entertainment. Equally viable are 20- to 70-minute feature films.

Short films may not require the same blockbuster budget as James Cameron's \$230M-plus *Avatar* (2009), or the \$30M that funded Damien Chazelle's box-office sensation *La La Land* (2016) — or even the reported \$4M that paid for 2016's Oscar-winning Best Picture, *Moonlight*. But with compelling stories to tell and only a few thousand dollars to spend, short-video producers will do whatever it takes to shoot in a real-life backdrop as opposed to in a studio backlot or against a computer-generated background.

Many California-based short-form content-makers do not believe in compromising on locations. "Locations are important to any film production, not just big-budget features," says Beverly Hills-based indie producer Rick Jenkins, president of ScreenMagic Films, citing "houses, parks, back roads, and abandoned buildings, because they are free". Jenkins' films, which include *Devil is my Witness* (2012), *Feast of the Possessed* (2013), and *The Z Virus* (2017-), are supported by a devoted following.

"Without locations, you have no place to shoot," he adds. "With short, low-budget films, you can actually write for the location you have, as opposed to making a location work for you because it's one of many in a big-budget feature film."

In the general-entertainment space is Matt Hoklotubbe, director of development at New Form (formerly New Form Digital), the multi-platform studio backed by TV conglomerate Discovery Communications, and Brian Grazer and Ron Howard, co-founders of Hollywood production group Imagine Entertainment. Santa Monica-based New Form, which started as a YouTube multichannel network (MCN), specializes in short-form shows aimed at millennials and Gen-Z viewers. Its short-form web series include *Mr. Student Body President* (2016-) and *I Ship It* (2016-).

Shooting in California brings unique properties to a production, Hoklotubbe believes. For a scene in *Miss 2059* (2016-), a 10-minute fantasy adventure series set in the future, he says he could rely on California:

"Normally, we don't set stories in places that are hard to reach. But we had to go to the desert and we found forests in Malibu. With the right effects, there are parts of California that look truly extra-terrestrial." And being located in California also comes with the benefit of close proximity to the filmmaking community. Hoklotubbe adds: "At New Form, we're talent-driven, and so the access to talent in Los Angeles is more economical and makes a lot more sense for our ensemble." Another fan of making it real in California is Autumn deVity, head of documentary and docudrama at AwesomenessTV, the MCN and studio jointly owned by DreamWorks Animation and Verizon Hearst Media Partners. Specializing in short-form entertainment for young audiences, deVity is the mastermind behind AwesomenessTV reality hits *Cheerleaders* (2013-), *L.A. Story* (2015-), and *Malibu Surf* (2017-), the latter a drama series that generates 400,000-plus views a week. Did deVity find it a challenge to find the right Californian locations for her premium-quality short-form series? "These days, you can use drones and get beautiful shots of the coast for about \$5,000. In the past, that would have cost you \$30,000," she says. "Also, I don't take no for answer. I'd have no issues calling Brad Pitt to star in my movie. It's all about how you approach it... A good producer is also a good salesperson."

#### AUTUMN DEVITRY

"These days, you can use drones and get beautiful shots of the coast for about \$5,000. In the past, that would have cost you \$30,000"

Jenkins, Hoklotubbe and deVity are among the growing number of experienced filmmakers that have tapped into the significant demand for short-form videos in the 21st century. Traditionally, short films have been seen as second-rate creations associated with experimenters, aspiring amateurs, student filmmakers — even misguided fantasists who want to be the next Steven Spielberg.

But the format, in fact, has a robust history that goes back to the very first moving pictures in the 19th century. Consider *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), the pioneering surreal piece created in 1929 by Salvador Dali and Luis Bunuel; Andy Warhol's experimental style in the 1960s; the storytelling genius of the 30-second TV ads that made the careers of movie directors including the UK's Alan Parker; and the fast-paced music videos on MTV in the 1980s that made Spike Jonze famous. In fact, Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment is named after *Amblin'*, a 26-minute short he made in 1968, said to be his first completed film. However, it remained expensive in both time and money to make short films until the internet and YouTube democratized the format in the 2000s. Cheaper cameras, computers and YouTube (which launched in 2005 and now sees 400 hours of content uploaded every minute) mean that ambitious filmmakers can hone their skills in their own homes.

Snack-sized videos became the rage from the late 2000s as a new generation of talent used YouTube to launch their own channels, build MCNs and create online celebrities to target hard-to-reach millennials. The likes of YouTube, Dailymotion and Vimeo, as well as the



rapid growth of streaming TV platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, have opened up an international market for professionally produced, bite-sized videos.

In 2017, even the established digital subscription platforms were faced with new competition. Social-media goliath Facebook launched Watch, a dedicated short-form video channel aimed at its two billion registered users. Ephemeral messaging platform Snapchat, meanwhile, announced plans to commission original content, and iPhone- and iPad-maker Apple unveiled plans to spend \$1BN on original content. These power players were responding to the demand for multiplatform entertainment for digital natives. The sale of mobile screen devices continues to soar, with the global telecoms trade organization GSM Association predicting 5.8 billion smartphone connections worldwide by 2020.

Eric Coyne, Tulare County film commissioner, is among many in California to welcome this fast-growing trend. Coyne, who has overseen location shoots in the region for numerous feature-film projects and reality-TV series, reports an increasing demand for short films and short-form videos. The county is also very popular with music videos, with recent work including *Find You*, a soundtrack by Russian-German recording producer-songwriter Zedd for the Hollywood movie *Divergent* (2014); the *Tumbayé* music video for Venezuelan star Oscar-cito, which is set in a Californian giant sequoia grove; and the video for *Grass Ain't Greener*, the 2015 hit for US R&B star Chris Brown.

Coyne says: "Short films generally mean shorter location shoots, so these can lead to instant validation of our film program with a very quick turnaround."

For Coyne, a film's duration is unimportant: "As long as it's a legitimate production with valid insurance, we will bend over backwards and treat it just like a larger production. What we are really hoping for is that someone doing something low-budget today will think of us

when they have a larger, more lucrative project."

Joël Bassaget, a Paris-based international freelance consultant specializing in digital and short-form content, argues that there is more to the current rise of the short-form video than its appeal to 21st century youth. "The filmmakers' motivation is changing," he says. "The basic YouTube model is a huge success with millions and millions of viewers and subscribers. Unfortunately, when it comes to fiction and comedies, for example, it only works for 0.1%. But now, there are many other platforms dedicated to shorts costing up to \$500,000 for just one season."

He adds: "Classic TV channels are now taking on web directors. They are adding the concept of shorts to the TV format. Every cable channel has at least one short that was originally on the web before becoming a hit. This also gives producers the motivation to put their premium content online, because there is now a chance for it to be seen and taken to the next level."

Bassaget says he has also seen an increase in the use of locations in low-budget web series, because "these days, they use drones with quality lenses, which they did not have in the past".

He also believes Netflix's global success has spurred the demand for short-form among other over-the-top (OTT) streaming platforms, from Amazon and telecom operators to the on-demand editions of established TV networks.

US telecoms giant Verizon is behind mobile-first platform go90. Jeffrey Katzenberg, the former Walt Disney Studios chairman and co-founder of DreamWorks and DreamWorks Animation, has launched a \$600M fund called WndrCo, which he hopes will grow into a \$2BN finance vehicle for mobile-first video entertainment aimed at 18- to 34-year-olds. Katzenberg is reported to be offering \$125,000 per minute for shorts that meet the high Hollywood standards that he is used to.

## A SELECTION OF AWARD-WINNING SHORT-FORM FILMS in various genres produced or co-produced by the California filmmaking industry



### **CRIME TIME (2016)**

**Origin:** France/Brazil  
**Production:** Studio+/Vingt Deux Heures Vingt Deux/John Doe Production

**Length:** 10-minute episodes  
**Description:** A thriller based on a true story about a rogue cop, who becomes a politician and a successful host of a crime-solving TV show, before morphing into a criminal mastermind himself. *Crime Time* was nominated for the 2017 International Emmy Awards. **California connection:** Studio+ uses the Los Angeles office of

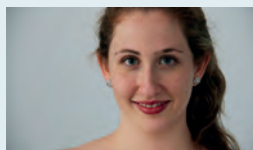
its sister companies, European production giant StudioCanal and international video-sharing platform Dailymotion, to shoot in the city when required.



### **AHI AFUERA (OUT THERE) (2016)**

**Origin:** France/Argentina  
**Production:** Studio+/Iconoclast  
**Length:** 10-minute episodes  
**Description:** A thriller about a complex love affair and a heist that goes totally wrong. Set in Patagonia and directed by Nicolas Perez Veiga, it was nominated for the

2017 International Emmy Awards. **California connection:** Iconoclast has a Los Angeles office.



### **SCREW YOU CANCER (2013)**

**Origin:** US  
**Production:** Conde Nast Entertainment  
**Length:** seven-minute episodes  
**Description:** A documentary following the trials, tribulations and triumphs of New York comedian Caitlin Brodnick, who takes the life-changing decision to undergo a double mastectomy to thwart the cancer gene that has killed members

of her family. *Screw You Cancer's* humor-driven approach won it the first Television Academy Honors Award to be presented to an online show. **California connection:** Conde Nast Entertainment develops and produces projects from its Hollywood offices.



### **JOE'S VIOLIN (2016)**

**Origin:** US  
**Production:** Conde Nast Entertainment  
**Length:** 24-minute film  
**Description:** A moving film about a 91-year-old Holocaust survivor, who donates his

70-year-old violin to a struggling school in the Bronx, New York. The life of a 12-year-old pupil is transformed when she decides to learn to play the instrument. The film, which premiered at the 2016 Tribeca Film Festival, was nominated for the Best Documentary Short Subject at the 2017 Academy Awards. Other accolades include a Webby Award, and Audience Awards at both the Milwaukee Film Festival and the Montclair Film Festival. **California connection:** Conde Nast Entertainment develops and produces projects from its Hollywood office.



California, especially Los Angeles, looks set to be at the center of this new generation of video content. Since joining AwesomenessTV, deVitory has made California the setting of her hit short-form web series. For her, short-form has given her a level of freedom she could never have imagined during her days working on reality-TV shows for the networks. “For a network show, ideas need to be signed off by so many people,” she says. “There were all these tiers. Today, you can produce things faster. If it’s only one-minute long and it’s good, people will watch it.”

Quality dictates a show’s success, not the duration, deVitory maintains: “I keep pushing the bar because I want to keep challenging myself. I want to get to a point where I just want great content. I’m not precious about the exact number of times it’s viewed, just as long as people watch it.”

ScreenMagic’s Jenkins, who is very specific about where his works are distributed, advises the industry against positioning short-form online entertainment as a labor of love. “I’m a full-time film producer and I’m always producing films to make a profit,” he says. “I haven’t found YouTube, Vimeo or Dailymotion to be good distribution outlets to make profitable films. Outside of traditional distribution deals with studios and distributors, Amazon.com is my go-to place to distribute my films.”

New Form’s Hoklotubbe says film producers would be unwise to dismiss short-form web-distributed content as second-rate to feature films: “There is an audience for it now, because there are platforms that are built to distribute short-form, like go90 and CW Seed in the US. Mobile viewing is on a huge rise. People are watching a lot of stuff on their phones, from *Game of Thrones* (2011-) to short-form.”

He adds: “The viewing period during one sitting is also growing. About two years ago, short-form had to be four to seven minutes long, but now it’s OK to produce 11-minute episodes. There is the emergence of amazing filmmakers and talent that have an audience of their own, and storytellers are developing short-form projects with them in mind.”

An example of such talent, Hoklotubbe says, is Anna Akana, a YouTube celebrity whose channel has had more than 162 million views and who boasts a social-media following of more than two million. She is the creator and star of New Form’s *Miss 2059*. “Anna wanted to be an actress and a sci-fi hero and, with *Miss 2059*, she asked why she couldn’t make the role herself and make the series,” Hoklotubbe says. “Her social-media subscribers are fans of her work and her storytelling skills, not her make-up or her lifestyle. So by the time she was working on this, she had the ability to bring her audience with her.”

Warner Bros. Television Group is one of many legacy media ventures investing in short-form entertainment. Its subsidiary, Blue Ribbon Content, is a Burbank-based studio that focuses on live-action series for digital distribution. Its productions can be found on go90 (comedy *Now We’re Talking*/2016-), YouTube Red (documentary *Best Shot*/2017), CW Seed (comedy *JoJoHead*/2016), ABC.com (*Ginger Snaps*/2017) and YouTube network Machinima (Justice League: Gods/2015 and *Monsters Chronicles*).

Studiocanal, the movie-studio subsidiary of French media conglomerate Vivendi, has an office in Los Angeles. It offers its resources to Studio+, which was launched in 2016 specifically with young mobile users in mind. Studio+’s portfolio, comprising five- to 10-minute scripted series designed for smartphones, is available to subscribers via a dedicated app. After initially focusing on the European and Latin American markets, it recently launched in the US, with several storylines located in American cities, including Los Angeles, which is the star of the original drama series *All You Need Is Me* (2016).

“In terms of locations, we need to be careful budget wise,” says Gilles Galud, CEO of Studio+. “But our goal is to offer escapism, so there is no way we would shoot scenes in a small apartment with only two rooms. We’ve gone to the favelas in Brazil, the deserts in Morocco and the ▲



#### ***I SHIP IT* (2016)**

**Origin:** US **Production:**

New Form **Length:**

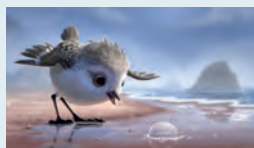
11-minute episodes

**Description:** A Webby Award-winning musical comedy about the fandom culture, which kicked off as a series on CW Seed, the on-demand platform belonging to the youth-focused US-based TV network The CW. A second season has now been commissioned, featuring longer episodes. Produced by New Form — the platform-agnostic company that started as a YouTube MCN — *I Ship It* was created and written by YouTuber Yulin Kuang, who adapted it from a short film she made in 2015. New Form is a joint venture between

Discovery Communications and Hollywood A-listers Brian Grazer and Ron Howard.

**California connection:**

New Form’s headquarters are located in Santa Monica, while Imagine Entertainment is located in Beverly Hills.



#### ***PIPER* (2016)**

**Origin:** US **Production:**

Pixar Animation Studios

**Length:** six-minute film

**Description:** The story about a hungry bird who learns to overcome fear to find food proves that Disney’s Pixar Studios is not limited to making long-form box-office hits such as *Toy Story* (1995), *Monsters, Inc.* (2001), *The Incredibles* (2004), *Up* (2009), *Cars* (2006) and

*Coco* (2017). *Piper* won the 2017 Oscar for Best Animated Short Film, as well as the 2017 Annie Award for Best Animated Short Subject.

**California connection:**

Pixar is located in Emeryville.



#### ***MISS 2059* (2016)**

**Origin:** US **Production:**

New Form **Length:**

10-minute episodes

**Description:** A sci-fi adventure series created by and starring actress, filmmaker and YouTuber Anna Akana. It is exclusively available in the US on go90, the mobile-first platform belonging to telecoms giant Verizon. The Streamy Awards-nominated show has also been licensed to Israel’s

Keshet International, which is distributing it on the international TV market. **California connection:** New Form’s headquarters are located in Santa Monica.



#### ***GAME OF DEATH* (2017)**

**Origin:** France/Canada/

US **Production:** Black-

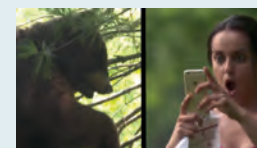
pillars/Rockzeline Wild

Studio/La Guérilla

**Length:** 70-minute

**Description:** An original horror series that depicts 24 gory deaths in only 70 minutes. It was created for Blackpillars, the new millennial-targeted OTT streaming platform co-founded by Daniel Marhely (co-founder of French international streaming music service

Deezer) and backed by French telecoms entrepreneur Xavier Niel. *Game of Death* has been a hit at festivals including SXSW and Miami’s Popcorn Frights Film Festival. **California connection:** Rockzeline has an international office in Los Angeles.



#### ***BAE OR BAIL* (2017)**

**Origin:** US **Production:**

45th & Dean **Length:**

four-minute episodes

**Description:** A candid-camera style series on Facebook’s new original-content platform Watch, the first episode of which generated more than 32 million views within only months of its launch. *Bae or Bail* is the first show made by A+E Networks’

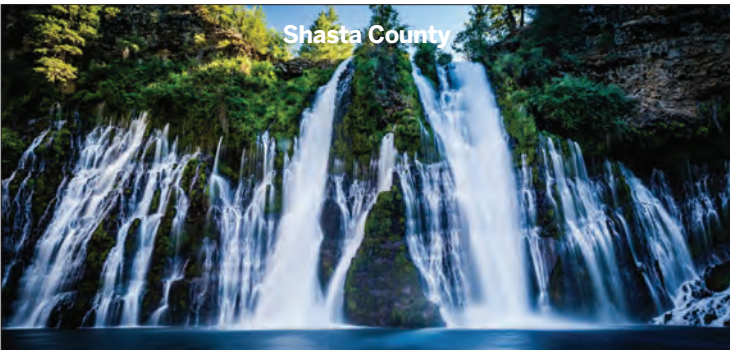


# THE NEWHALL LAND AND FARMING COMPANY

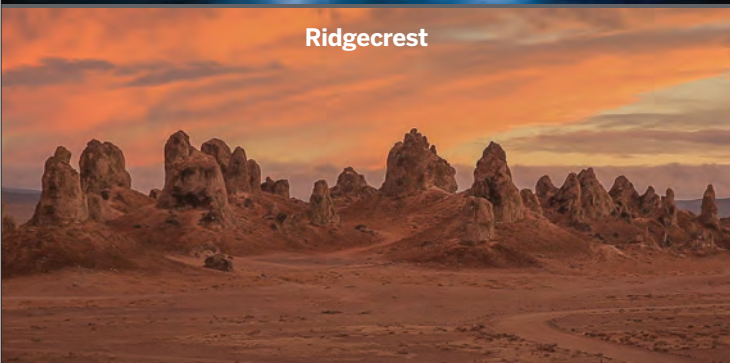
NEWHALL  
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LOCATIONS

THE MOST  
VERSATILE MOVIE  
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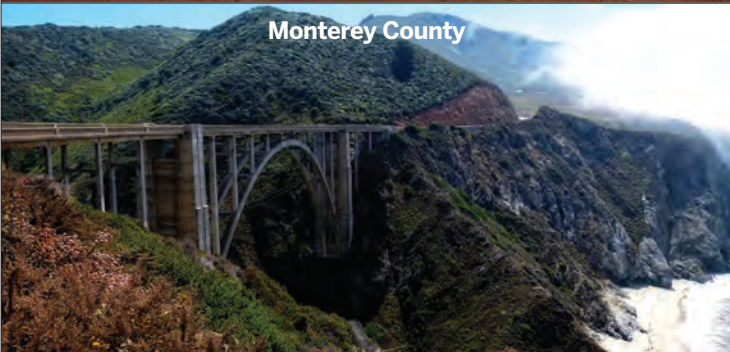
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snow in Canada, and to L.A.”

Meanwhile, the short-form bug is spreading across the rest of the US and across the world. 45th & Dean, the new in-house creative agency belonging to US TV giant A+E Networks, specializes in digital content and branded entertainment. It recently opened a dedicated full-service studio in Brooklyn, New York and is already making a mark by producing some of the first original video shorts to be delivered on Facebook’s Watch and Snapchat’s Discover.

Paul Greenberg, executive vice-president and general manager at 45th & Dean, explains why A+E Networks, partly owned by The Walt Disney Company, is investing in short-form entertainment: “Short-form is the sweet spot of mobile-first content. A whole generation that has been using phones their entire lives are taking over the media. Short-form content is winning awards, getting monetized and has an audience.”

Greenberg also points out how short-form entertainment has led to the development of new filmmaking skills: “For Snapchat, we have to shoot at verticals and think of camera angles that feel wide, even when they are not. Square videos work best on Facebook. But, crucially, you need to capture the audience’s attention during the first three seconds of the video.”

Global entertainment behemoth FremantleMedia, which operates one of Hollywood’s TV-production hubs in Burbank, has joined forces with book-publishing giant Penguin Random House to launch the first-ever web series — *World’s Best Boyfriend* — for the Indian market.

Over in the UK, Little Dot Studios reports that its advertiser and marketer clients, which have included US soft-drinks giant PepsiCo, German car brand Porsche and electric-car motor-racing tournament Formula E, will pay handsomely for quality branded content to show on YouTube and other digital platforms, such as Amazon Fire. And to meet the high standards required, location shooting is often a

prerequisite.

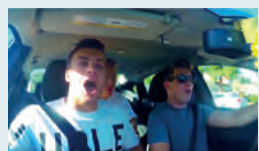
“Social platforms are heading into our living rooms, as well as being watched on mobile. We believe that these platforms are going to be more premium, so advertisers are starting to demand premium and even mid-form content of between 10 to 15 minutes each,” says London-based Andy Taylor, co-founder and managing director of Little Dot Studios.

The BBC, the UK public-service network, overhauled its youth-focused broadcasting channel, BBC Three, and turned it into an online-only short-form content platform in 2016. Despite initial skepticism, BBC Three is earning a reputation for the quality of its content, which includes critically acclaimed 10-minute series *Overshadowed*. The drama, which premiered in 2017, is based on an award-winning play by UK writer Eva O’Connor about a young anorexia sufferer. It uses a series of vlogs to portray a much-misunderstood medical condition in a bold new way.

“BBC Three wants to be connecting with young audiences whenever and wherever they choose,” says Max Gogarty, executive editor at BBC Three. “Short-form also enables us to experiment with innovative new forms of content and new talent, and act as a pathfinder for the rest of the BBC. But it all depends on what the story lends itself to. Some films are best shot on a phone and better for feeling lo-fi, and others require proper sets and production values.”

Back in California, Hollywood is embracing the format just as enthusiastically. With *Now We’re Talking* (2016), Blue Ribbon Content is showing how short-form videos come with the flexibility to be evolved into more sophisticated formats in the long term. The original sports-themed comedy series was commissioned from Uninterrupted, the production company co-founded by NBA basketball legend LeBron James. It has now been renewed for a second season on Verizon’s go90. This time out, the eight-part Writers Guild Award-nominated series, which centers on two former professional football quarterbacks, is being scaled up from eight- to 11-minute episodes to a half-hour format. ●

45th & Dean for Watch. **California connection:** 45th & Dean is part of the Disney empire, while Facebook is headquartered in Menlo Park.



**L.A. STORY (2015)**  
**Origin:** US **Production:** AwesomenessTV **Length:** eight-minute episodes  
**Description:** A reality series that chronicles the daily highs and lows of a tight-knit group of affluent teenage friends living in Los Angeles. AwesomenessTV — a joint venture between NBCUniversal’s DreamWorks Animation and US telecoms conglomerate Verizon —

has evolved from a YouTube MCN into a multiplatform production studio. Following a deal with UK commercial network ITV in 2016, *L.A. Story* and other AwesomenessTV short-form shows now air on UK broadcast television. **California connection:** AwesomenessTV is headquartered in Los Angeles.



**SECOND CHANCE (2017)**  
**Origin:** US **Production:** 45th & Dean **Length:** five-minute episodes  
**Description:** An eight-episode weekly reality series that reunites former

lovers to re-evaluate why their relationships broke down. Second Chance goes down in history as the first original series commissioned for Snapchat, the messaging mobile app aimed at millennials. It was produced by creative agency 45th & Dean, a subsidiary of US TV group A+E Networks for Snapchat’s Discover platform. A+E Networks is a joint venture between The Walt Disney Company and Hearst Communications. **California connection:** 45th & Dean is part of the Disney empire, while Snapchat’s head office is based in Los Angeles.



**DAEMONIUM (2011)**  
**Origin:** Argentina  
**Production:** Hydra Corp  
**Description:** A Spanish-language sci-fi fantasy horror that took years to complete because it was produced as a series, one chapter at a time. That labor of love has paid off with a strong cult following among lovers of the weird and wonderfully insane. Daemonium has also won numerous film-festival accolades and is now available on Netflix as a one-hour, 55-minute film. **California connection:** Netflix conducts all its business, including the licensing of content, from California.



**MR. STUDENT BODY PRESIDENT (2016)**  
**Origin:** US **Production:** New Form **Length:** 14-minute episodes  
**Description:** A comedy drama on Verizon’s US mobile platform go90 that follows the shenanigans of a highly ambitious high-school body president. Tipped to become a global hit, the show’s growing international presence includes slots on streaming platforms All 4 in the UK and canalrcn.com in Colombia. **California connection:** New Form’s headquarters are located in Santa Monica.



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# VR & AR WHAT'S THE BUZZ?

*Buzz Aldrin:  
Cycling Pathways  
to Mars,  
from FuseFX*

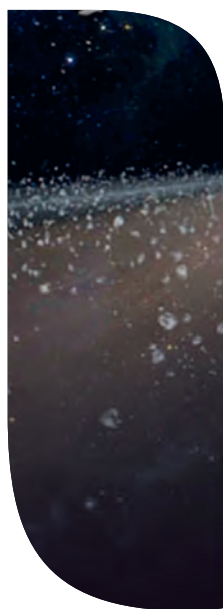


The revenues to be generated by businesses linked to virtual reality and augmented reality are huge, if predictions are to be believed, and California is playing a key role in all aspects of this new platform. Juliana Koranteng reports

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*The Possible: Listening to the Universe, from L.A.-based Within*





**INVESTMENT** bank Goldman Sachs predicts both virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) will deliver \$80BN globally by 2025. San Francisco-based research group Greenlight Insights, meanwhile, forecasts almost \$75BN will come from VR alone by 2021. And IDC goes even further, stating that VR and AR businesses will be generating close on \$215BN by 2021.

Those predictions cover VR and AR applications of all kinds, including car manufacturing and healthcare. But whatever the actual amount generated, they include revenues to be made from today's almost \$40BN international filmed-entertainment sector, which is fully embracing VR.

So what is VR? And how does it differ from AR? For the uninitiated, VR invites its users to immerse their physical bodies inside a virtual world by wearing special goggles that cut them off from their immediate physical surroundings. AR uses similar technology to superimpose digitally created objects onto a user's physical surroundings, which can be seen via the screen of a digital device. The

*Pokémon GO* app game, which enables players to use their smartphones to grab 3D virtual creatures, sums up what AR can do. But both tech systems are being applied to all types of content, including music videos, factual entertainment, commercials, branded content and scripted drama. An example is L.A.-based VR creative agency Within's *The Possible* series, a five-part branded-content science documentary co-funded by multinational GE to highlight its contribution to cutting-edge engineering. Demian Lichtenstein, CEO of Futurism Entertainment, believes VR's long-term potential could be truly amazing. With a background that includes working with Hollywood director James Cameron on the groundbreaking 2009 film *Avatar*, Lichtenstein's goal is to set up an operation that brings together the best in entertainment and tech. "This is possible with the convergence of the storytelling power of motion pictures and television, the engine of games, and the immersive space of VR and AR wrapped in quantum super-computing," he says. "We're in the process of buying a number of long-standing and high-profile games, and VR and AR companies to form a much larger group that will creatively take on the future of entertainment."

Unsurprisingly, Silicon Valley, which has disrupted the traditional global media and entertainment sectors with its inventive applications for social media, search engines and, soon, artificial intelligence (AI), has been at the forefront of investing in VR and AR technologies. Facebook triggered that investment storm by paying \$2BN for VR headset-maker Oculus in 2014. For the full immersive-VR experience, audiences will need sophisticated and very expensive headsets, for example Facebook's Oculus Rift.

Google has entered the field with its Daydream View headset. Then there is the Samsung Gear VR headset, and the HTC Vive. And Microsoft is currently testing the potential of its HoloLens, which offers mixed-reality (MR) experiences by melding VR and AR.

Sony's PlayStation VR headset is targeted mainly at gamers. But with its parent company also owning the Hollywood film and TV studio Sony Pictures, PlayStation VR also works with VR film and TV. PlayStation's goggles, which can cost between \$400 and \$1,000, are also

physically heavy. For users to navigate their way around the virtual world, they need to hold controllers attached to both the headsets and expensive, powerful PC computers. Moreover, some viewers have complained about feeling isolated behind the headsets and experiencing nausea when introduced to unfamiliar settings inside the synthetic world.

However, the prices of headsets are gradually falling. Meanwhile, lighter wireless versions of Oculus Rift and Samsung Gear VR are coming on to the market, and VR content creators are honing their editing skills to eliminate the dizzy spells suffered by some users. And for those who do not want to be alone in a virtual surrounding, social-VR technology is being developed to enable headset-wearers to enter one virtual environment where they can share the same content with family and friends.

Despite the billions being spent on the technology, immersive media is still very new. To help consumers reach the critical-mass stage, Facebook and Google's YouTube are among the ventures gradually introducing consumers to VR via 360-degree videos. These can be watched on YouTube or Facebook via cheap goggles such as the Google Cardboard, which only requires a folded cardboard viewer containing a smartphone to function as a headset. As these are wireless, the wearer's movements are not restricted by controllers attached to computers.

Going forward, expect more consumer-friendly offerings on the hardware front. In San Francisco, wearable technology company ODG is manufacturing light headsets that are more like heavy reading glasses than weighty goggles. "Headsets will get smaller and

#### DEMIAN LICHTENSTEIN

"We're buying a number of high-profile games, and VR and AR companies to form a larger group that will creatively take on the future of entertainment"

autonomous, including those that can do both VR and AR," says Bud Myrick, VR supervisor at movie-VFX specialist FuseFX.

Bigscreen, which is headquartered in Berkeley, California, is in the throes of inventing an app for a virtual cinema-size screen that can pop up anywhere to enable viewers to play games or watch filmed-VR entertainment.

And Futurism's Lichtenstein even foresees a near future when the application of AI and quantum computing will take VR entertainment to truly high levels.

When the VR trailer for *The Martian*, Ridley Scott's 2015 movie starring Matt Damon, received extensive coverage in the mainstream media, content creators started to match the technological progress with ambitious concepts made with this new visual language. In March, FuseFX, which has added VR to its VFX repertoire, unveiled *Buzz Aldrin: Cycling Pathways to Mars*, a collaboration with holographic-tech specialist 8i, a New Zealand company with a Los Angeles subsidiary. The project features Aldrin, the second man to walk on the moon, talking about the potential benefits that the Red Planet ▲



has to offer humans. Interestingly, it is a full-VR experience being promoted by a 360-degree video trailer — a sign of how mainstream 360-degree videos are becoming.

*Cycling Pathways to Mars* came with its own thrills and spills, according to FuseFX's Myrick: "Buzz is shot with 50 cameras around him, because it had to be frame-by-frame perfect. And it meant we could give it a cinematic flair."

The project is "a room-scale experience," Myrick adds, referring to the new-tech capability of allowing enough physical space around the viewer, who is then able literally to move around a room and feel that he or she is interacting with the virtual environment.

*Escape the Living Dead* (2016), a tribute to 1970s zombie movies, is a FuseFX project made with fast-growing studio Jaunt VR and designed to see the horror narrative from a zombie's point of view. It includes scenes shot in the desert near Palm Springs. "That was crazy," Myrick says. "It was shot with 16 GoPro cameras and featured explosions, helicopters, tanks... We had cameras being held by the actors playing the zombies, so you had actors constantly coming towards moving cameras."

It soon emerges that filmmakers need to put aside everything they know about traditional filmmaking. As Myrick says: "I don't think of VR as a screen, but as an environment in which to tell a story. That means all the traditional filmmaking practices go out of the window. The camera isn't capturing a focused point of view — it's capturing an unfocused one." Consequently, post-production skills become even more vital.

Maureen Fan, co-founder and CEO of Redwood Shores, CA-based Baobab Studios, has seen how VR can influence an audience's emotional response to a film and make them want to become part of the story. "When you see a little girl crying in real life, you want to leave your cinema seat to go and help her," she says. "In a movie, you wonder who goes and helps her. In a video game, you only want to help her to get to the next level. In VR, the urgency of games, the empathy of film and the motivation of real life [come together to] create a new dynamic. With VR, because you care about the characters, you feel you can do something. With hand controllers, that's possible, because you can play a role and be much more interactive."

However, VR technology is still a pricey beast and that continues to affect the quantity of content available in the market. "There isn't enough content, because VR is expensive to make," she adds. "Even if we could make more, the quality wouldn't necessarily be great, because all of us are still experimenting."

Baobab has been lucky to have already had a hit, Fan adds, referencing the award-winning VR animation film *Invasion!* (2016). "But we also know there is so much more to learn. There needs to be a lot more content for people to want to pay for it. We need to reach that point." That said, Hollywood's interest in VR is solid. Venice, California-based Wevr counts former News Corporation executive Ross Levinsohn among its investors. The Walt Disney Company has interests in Palo Alto-based Jaunt VR. The investment units at Time Warner and NBCUniversal's owner Comcast have got the back of NextVR, another California enterprise, while 21st Century Fox and Legendary Pictures have poured cash into Within, which specializes in factual filmmaking.

Meanwhile, Utah-based start-up The Void has joined forces with Disney subsidiaries Lucasfilm and ILMxLAB to create hyper-VR attractions at Disney theme parks. The first, called *Star Wars: Secrets of the Empire*, has launched at Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando and Disneyland Resort in Anaheim.

The out-of-home location-based VR entertainment on offer at the

Disney parks is part of a new trend that movie-business companies are adopting. In addition to Steven Spielberg, Dreamscape Immersive's investors include MGM and Warner Bros. US cinema operator AMC Entertainment, which is also an investor, plans to introduce a series of dedicated centers at malls and cinema multiplexes across the US and UK to host VR experiences created by Dreamscape.

IMAX, the mega-sized cinema-screen operator, has launched a series of IMAX VR Centers in various cities worldwide, including the flagship center in Los Angeles. The cinema sector hopes that these new out-of-home entertainment formats will lure a new generation of film fans currently fixated on the download apps for streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon.

Whether California will support its filmmaking community in their VR ambitions by offering subsidies of some kind is too early to tell. But Facebook is pushing VR into the average Californian's hand. In June, it emerged that the conglomerate had donated hundreds of Oculus Rift headsets to California book libraries to enable them to introduce the experience to those who cannot afford headsets or have not thought about VR.

Another challenge for content producers is live VR, which Digital Domain has embraced. The company's immersive media has been used in the *Stonemilker* video for maverick music star Björk, in Nike's *The Neymar Jr Effect* for ad agency Weiden+Kennedy and for the Syfy TV network.

Its bespoke technology has also been used in *House of Legends*, the first original VR series from the American professional basketball organization NBA. It is an episodic, almost-live talk show hosted by NBA veterans. "We built an infrastructure to accommodate real-time streaming for viewers and developed custom tech to stream all the interviews over the air to headsets," says Aruna Inversin, Digital Domain's creative director and VFX supervisor of VR/AR.

Wevr's co-founder and executive vice-president, Anthony Batt, is

#### BUD MYRICK

"I don't think of VR as a screen, but as an environment in which to tell a story. That means all the traditional filmmaking practices go out of the window"

optimistic about the next generation of filmmakers' adoption of VR, especially with academic institution such as Emerson College in Los Angeles offering a VR filmmaking course. He also points out that the cameras, rigs and other production equipment needed to film in VR are increasingly very affordable.

Batt adds: "GoPro's action and drone cameras are responsible for point-of-view shooting, which is when you strap a camera on babies or pets to see things from their point of view. GoPro is now releasing cameras offering points-of-view in both directions. With that ability, audiences will start asking why they are only seeing one point-of-view. That will affect filmmaking and innovation over time, and the professionals will have to address that." ●



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# VIRTUAL REALITY, REAL LOCATIONS

As VR moves into the Hollywood mainstream, a new generation of Californian filmmakers is busy colonising the next frontier of entertainment. But, Juliana Koranteng discovers there's nothing virtual about the locations needed to create great VR content. In reality, you still have to be there...



VIRTUAL reality (VR), the immersive technology mostly associated with advances in video-games entertainment, is going cinematic. And the filmmakers taking advantage of this emerging medium can be found on diverse locations across California.

"It's essential to choose the right location in VR. Just like the humans and animals present in a film, the location is a character," says Solomon 'Solly' Mirell, staff production supervisor at Los Angeles-headquartered VR studio Here Be Dragons.

Here Be Dragons is the prolific start-up that recently sealed \$10M in a new funding round led by Discovery Communications and ad agency guru David Droga. It has co-produced content linked to several TV shows and films, including *Legion* (2017-), the sci-fi series on the FX network, Paramount Pictures' movie *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) and USA Network's *Mr. Robot* (2015-).

As the use of VR tech in filmmaking is still in the early stages, several productions have taken the form of short promotional trailers for edgy TV shows. The 10-minute trailer for *Legion*, for example, is *Sessions: The Legion Mixed Reality Experience*. It was showcased at last year's San Diego Comic-Con International, where fans wore Microsoft's HoloLens headsets to enter the series' universe and experience that world via mixed reality (MR), which melds VR with augmented reality (AR).

Here Be Dragons was also involved in the acclaimed standalone VR film *The Last Goodbye* (2017), a powerful testimonial to the tragedy of

the Holocaust. To re-enact the painful experiences of Holocaust survivor Pinchas Gutter at Majdanek, Here Be Dragons filmed at the former Nazi concentration camp in Poland where Gutter's parents and sister were murdered during World War II.

Here Be Dragons was also among the co-creators of the pioneering *Evolution of Verse* (2015), which premiered at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival's New Frontier exhibition and made its mark by melding immersiveness and computer graphics to highlight the new impact VR brings to filmmaking.

And that includes location shots, which have become critical to a medium that can engross users in a virtual world that looks and feels realistic but effectively does not exist.

Mirell explains: "When you choose a location, you must also be aware of what is above, behind and in front of you, and why. You want people using VR to be prepared to give up their own physical surroundings and explore the space. You need something compelling behind and in front of you; not something gimmicky."

For *Discovery TRVLR*, Here Be Dragons' most ambitious project to date, its production crew hiked to several countries on seven continents for the 38-episode, three-minute travel-and-adventure documentary series co-funded by Discovery and Google. It is available to watch as 360-degree videos on YouTube, the *DiscoveryVR.com* website and Discovery VR's app via Google's Daydream View or the cheaper Google Cardboard headsets.

What VR can bring to the art of filmmaking has intensified Hollywood's love affair with the technology. Steven Spielberg is among the investors in Los Angeles-based VR start-up Dreamscape Immersive. Actor and director Jon Favreau, helmer of *The Jungle Book* (2016) and the *Iron Man* (2008-) superhero franchise, worked with California-based VR studio Wevr to create *Gnomes & Goblins*





Shooting VR murder mystery *Gone*

(2017), an interactive animation fantasy piece.

Meanwhile, Eric Darnell, co-founder of Redwood City-based VR animation firm Baobab Studios, wrote and co-created DreamWorks Animation's *Madagascar* (2005-) movie franchise. Baobab's high-profile VR animation *Invasion!*, which stars Hollywood star Ethan Hawke, has won a 2017 Daytime Emmy. Nor did Baobab have any problem persuading Hollywood actress Elizabeth Banks to take part in the follow-up, *Asteroids!* (2017). Now Roth Kirschenbaum Films, the joint venture between Hollywood production stalwarts Joe Roth and Jeffrey Kirschenbaum, has announced plans for a feature-film adaptation of *Invasion!*.

The enthusiasm of Hollywood's creatives for VR has prompted the VR studios to raise the bar in terms of quality. "Using locations in VR film creates new feelings," says Anthony Batt, Wevr's co-founder and executive vice-president. "Locations matter even more to the narrative and the scenes take on different tones."

In California, Wevr hiked to Balch Park in the southern Sierra Nevada mountains for scenes in *Gone*, a VR murder mystery made in 2015. For *Waves*, a project starring surreal-comedy entertainer Reggie Watts and UK actress Nathalie Emmanuel, Wevr went to Malibu's beaches. "By chance, at sunset, we could see these whales by the shore. It was one of those unbelievably magical moments that you couldn't script," Batt says. Demian Lichtenstein is CEO and founder of new immersive-experience company Futurism Entertainment. The start-up is focused on building what Lichtenstein believes could be the ultimate filmed-entertainment venture melding creativity and technology. And he believes California is the place to realise that vision.

"California has an extraordinary array of locations within a couple of hours' drive — magnificent beaches, mountains, snow, desert and jungle," he says. "It represents such a diverse array of locations, crew and talent for VR and 360-degree entertainment. It's amazing."

However, shooting VR on location comes with challenges. With standard filmmaking, the camera shoots only what is in front, based on the director's choices. For the VR experience to be truly immersive, the 360-degree cameras capture everything in the immediate surroundings. Crewmembers have to hide so as not to appear in the footage.

In addition to the latest VR cameras, specialist remote-controlled drones are now available that can capture the skies and aerial views. "On those occasions, it's a matter of doing your research well. You need to carry out preliminary inspections first," says Aruna Inversin, creative director and VFX supervisor of VR/AR at visual-effects giant Digital Domain, which has shot on locations in California for Tourism Santa Monica and the Sunkist brand. "Fortunately, we're familiar with the region," he adds. "For example, we know we don't want drones to enter certain parts of the airspace, so we inform the regulators. And because we have a background in VFX, we have the means to remove unwanted elements in the shots."

Such expertise has turned California into a home for a new generation of filmmakers, especially in Los Angeles, which is becoming the centre of the US VR and AR entertainment business.

"Our studio is part of L.A.," Inversin says. "We're across the street from Facebook's offices, not far from Samsung and Century City [home of Fox Studios], and VRScout is next door. The ad agencies are also located here. We're in the middle of the creative hub." ●



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## JOAN AGUADO

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### CHARLA TEETERS

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### ORANGE COUNTY

Orange County Film Commission

### JANICE ARRINGTON

Film Commissioner  
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www.filmorangecounty.org



### RIVERSIDE COUNTY

Riverside County Film Commission  
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Riverside CA 92501

### BETTINA BRECKENFELD & STEPHANIE STETHEM

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### SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

San Bernardino County Film Office  
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## **VENTURA COUNTY**

Ventura County Film Commission  
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## **BILL BARTELS**

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**SALINAS VALLEY, MONTEREY** (photo, courtesy Karen Nordstrand/Monterey County Film Commission)

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